# ADMIRAL'S LIGHT

HENRY·MILNER·RIDEOUT

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# ADMIRAL'S LIGHT

ANNA HILLIARD

*From a drawing by Martin Justice*

# ADMIRAL'S LIGHT

BY

HENRY MILNER RIDEOUT

*Author of Beeched Keels, The Siamese Cat, etc.*

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS*

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To

NATHANIEL ALLISON, M. D.

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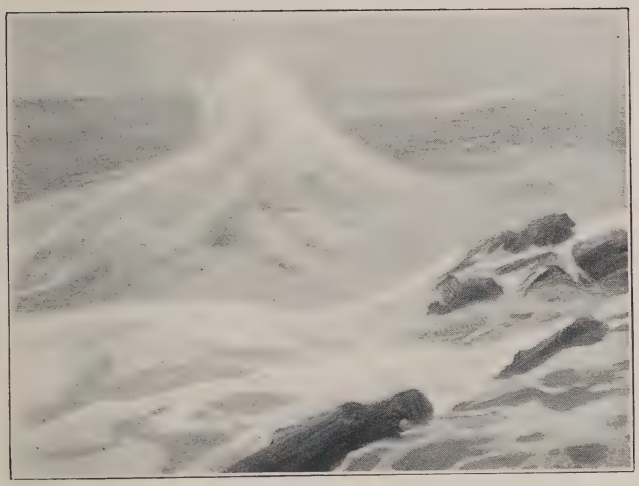
NOTE. *The frontispiece is from a drawing by Martin Justice. The eleven half-titles are from drawings by Charles H. Woodbury.*



# ADMIRAL'S LIGHT

## CHAPTER I

### THE GYPSY MARE

THRUSTING his tousled head through the trap-door, Miles made his third and last inspection for the night. Fierce yellow light flooded the glass cage; against the panes, like restless, irritated snowflakes, a few belated moths fluttered in vain. The circular base of the lamp cast downward a shadow so black as almost to appear a solid supporting cone. At the edge of this Miles reared his shoulders higher. Under the blue flannel shirt their weary movement was that of a sleepy boy; but his thin, dark face shone

grave as a man's. He sniffed the familiar smell of oil and hot brass, and glanced perfunctorily; the lamp burned as bright as it had three hours ago, at midnight, or as it would burn three hours hence, at sunrise, — with the same provoking virtue that made his nocturnal rounds a waste of labor and sleep.

"Some one has to," he said aloud. "Burn away, Beast!" With this customary good-night, he clattered downstairs, locked the light-house door, caught up his lantern, and went whistling along the narrow path by the river. From below, to the left, stole the salt coolness of seaweed bared at low tide, — a sharp aroma that set him wide awake. From above, over a black phantom hill, peered Orion's red shoulder-star. Hurtling shadows of undergrowth before his lantern rose mag-

nified, parted in rout, wheeled slowly, fell prostrate and infinitely prolonged. The grass fringe of his smooth-beaten trail gleamed with a pearly rime of autumnal dew. "Nearly frost to-night," thought the boy.

He raced down into a steep gully, drummed across a little foot-bridge, took by scrambling assault the other bank, and on the crest, suddenly, as their black wall yawned to engulf him, entered a low grove of pines and cedars. The cold wet bristles bedewed his hands, as he skipped along, now scuffing loudly on a worn ledge, now over a stretch of wet touchwood, the full, fern-bordered length of a vanished log, that made him advance silent as a ghost.

A ghost—he often thought of that, for now came the one mild excitement. Three times every night, his grandfather's unofficial dep-

uty, he tramped this triangular beat, downhill, along the shore between the two fixed lights, uphill again to the farmhouse. At first a lark, this tramp had in the last year become dull monotony; his score, penciled in the back of his beloved atlas, showed over a thousand tours, on which nothing ever happened; and yet now and then, as he neared the Admiral's deck, he felt the childhood presentiment that just ahead something would appear. Usually a nameless emotion, faint and swiftly obliterated, it came now, in the early morning darkness, almost as the pristine thrill.

At the place which had helped to name the whole shore, his path widened into a clearing beside a low bluff. The lantern twirled its shadow-ribs across a floor of rotten wood,—old ship's planking, the few solid remnants au-

ger-bored. Here, beside a stout rail which now tottered over the dark gulf, Admiral Bissant, the boy's great-uncle, had walked the quarter-deck in his dotage. Miles's grandfather never mentioned the tradition; but old Fisherman Bull had often told how, dropping down river in the Mystic Tie, he had seen an aged figure pacing the verge above, in faced uniform and cocked hat. "Givin' orders he was," said the fisher, "to nobody—trompin' an' mumblin' amongst the trees, bossin' hemlocks fer men." To prove the story there remained uniform, cocked hat, and sword as well, rescued by Uncle Christopher when the old Bissant house burned, and now hung in the "front hall" of their cottage. And these mouldering planks still outlined the landfast quarter-deck. A ghost there must be, Ella said. Of course that was her nonsense. Only a

faint breeze of dawn sighed through the drooping needles.

"Nothing ever happens," thought Miles. He dived into a dark billow of firs, brushed along with now and then a gossamer damp across his cheeks, and following the outward curve of the shore, emerged on a tiny promontory, down which a ragged wall of Norway pines sloped to the second lighthouse, —another stunted white obelisk tipped with radiance. Here again his inspection was needless; and soon he climbed the homeward field, where fast encroaching fir-trees squatted like a thinned regiment of dwarfs.

At the farmhouse door he blew out his lantern; and tiptoeing from the stair-head past his grandfather's room, undressed in the dark, and was soon abed and asleep.

Full flood of autumn sunshine woke him;

and from a late breakfast alone, he went, as usual, straight to the "library." Before a snapping beech-wood fire, his grandfather, a tall, spare man, whose ruddy, clean-shaven face was marked with severe wrinkles, paced in uncertain fidgets, both hands clasping a Bible at his back.

"Get your Testament, sir," he commanded querulously, without turning his hook-nosed profile. Ella, the "girl" who had served their family these thirty years, looked up and nodded furtive encouragement, then bent to as furtive a study of the long words. Sitting beside her, Miles could see the fat fingers, white and puckered from hot water, faltering across the narrow columns, balking beneath Urbane, Stachys, Tryphena and Tryphosa. When her turn came to read aloud, she omitted them one and all, glibly, but with the

air of a nervous knitter dropping stitches. The old man, standing braced before the fire, affected not to notice. It was one of his few compromises. He read on sonorously, his head uplifted before the portrait of his brother, the Admiral, who stared down from the canvas with the same ruddy face and close white curls, the same beaked severity and intolerant poise.

Their devotions ended, Ella went bustling to her kitchen, and the head of the Bissant family turned to its youngest survivor.

"Good-morning, sir! Are you any better prepared to-day?" With eyes of a confused, smoky brightness, he surveyed his grandson, then searched the few old books on the shelves. "Hmm! Sallust — yes, just so. Come, begin — where 's the lesson, eh? — No, not there, either, take it all! — Hmm!

—Ah, here 't is, boy: *Volturcius interrogatus de itinere*—"

"Please, sir," said Miles humbly, "we don't — it's Saturday, grandfather."

"Eh, what the devil?" complained the old man. "So 't is, boy, so 't is. Always Saturday." Frowning vaguely, he thumped the book on the table. "Well, and how d' ye propose to waste your time to-day?"

"Shooting, sir, if you don't mind," ventured Miles. "The law's off on patri —"

"Don't let me hear that barbarism!" cried his grandfather bitterly. "Must we talk like rustics? If you *will* miscall the ruffed grouse, sir, call it p-a-r-t — partridge! Say it!"

"Partridge, sir," mumbled the boy sheepishly.

"Louder!"

"Partridge."

"Again!"

"Partridge, sir."

"Now go," commanded his grandfather, "and write out that word fifty times, before Monday's lesson! — Come back here; who said I'd finished? Write it with a capital R!"

"Yes, sir," said Miles, and slipped from the room. The door closed, and the rebuke vanished; for there stood the shotgun ready in the corner, and Ella packing his basket. As he stepped out into autumn sunshine, he repaid her with a promise, —

"I'll bring home some good pat — partridges."

"Fat ones?" she jeered, her freckled face again in the doorway. "Then you'll have to feed 'em first. A high old hunter are you! They're still in the lowlands a-stuffin' alderberries, thin as Macfarlane's geese."

"I did n't say fat partridges, Ella," he called back. A shrill protest pursued him: "O-o-h, Master Miles, you did, because I heard you!"

Behind their house the hillside rose, abrupt, and slippery with ripe yellow grass. After a brief climb Miles could look back over the warped roof and see the convex field plunge toward the river. Pausing again for breath, he could see the trunks of the two tall hackmatacks which stood before the door, green pillars of an imaginary gate. From between them two brown paths forked wide,—sides of the triangle described by his nightly tour. Pines and underbrush of solemn evergreen hid the distant base, but the twin lighthouses marked each extremity by a fat white column, low and red-capped. Beyond these, in the crisp air, the river shone steel-blue,

streaked with tides, blackened with light squalls, and throughout the two miles of its width, empty, except for the dotted penciling of weirs, and for one dark fir knoll, the little midway island. Yellow birches, scarlet maples, flamed like bale-fires along the evergreen headlands on the other shore; but hayfields of the American borderers, over there, still remained verdant squares, dressed in the living green of second crops.

He gained the crest, and shifting his gun, struck across a decrepit orchard toward the green wall of the woods. Suddenly a white fleck, through the pattern of gnarled boughs, stirred in the adjoining field. A horse whinnied. The boy stopped in astonishment. What were men and horses doing by the ruins of the old house? He changed his course.

Where the Admiral's house, last sign of family prosperity, had long ago burned to the ground, the cellar yawned like a grassy crater in a pasture knoll. Hawthorns, a hedge grown high and wild, screened the mound on its river side; and framed in glossy leaves and scarlet clusters, a little man scrubbed vigorously the back of a tethered pony. The beast was curiously piebald, blotched with snow white and dingy gray.

Miles and the pony stared at each other. The man, without pausing, turned a swarthy face, scowled, and then grinned.

"Hello, Squair," he called slyly, "don't give a poor chap away now, will ye?"

"Give what away?" said Miles, wondering.

"Pipe-clay," replied the stranger. He dangled a rag aloft, stirred it in a bucket on the grass, and smeared another snow-white

patch down the pony's flank. "How's that, huh? Look a-here," — his crafty black eyes twinkled, — "I'll tell you what, Squair. If you won't give me away, I'll let ye finish the rest of him."

Miles joyfully vaulted the rails. Horses, in his life, had been rare. Hardly had he begun this new, odd, and delectable employment, before the little man was seated on the mound of ruin, a luxurious critic.

"Don't rub so hard." He stuffed tobacco into a black pipe. "Ye ain't curryin'. Coat her smooth and even."

Pleasure gave way, at last, to curiosity.

"What's it for?" asked the boy.

"Well, now, 't ain't my fault," rejoined the stranger candidly. "But our paterons *do* like to see a white horse. No use o' talkin', they do. Now Terry's smart as the Old Sar-

pint, but he ain't altogether a thorough white. Not thorough and complete, he ain't."

"Why, he's a gray!" cried Miles, patting the inquisitive muzzle.

"I give ye credit for that!" approved the man. "To them that did n't know him well, Terry *would* seem grayish. I don't deny they's mottles, suspicion o' gray, in places, as you say."

Behind the speaker, a black shape bounced up out of the ground. A large Newfoundland dog, leaping from the cellar, raced down the bank, frisked about Miles with wide-flung paws, made a kind of salmon leap into the air, turned an amazing somersault, and, rebounding from the grass, perched on the pony's back. Next moment he sprang down again, and with forepaws on the boy's shoulders, barked riotously in his face.

"Oh!" cried Miles, dazed and deafened. "So that's it. You keep a show!"

The little man blew upward a cloud of smoke in the sunlight, and nodded lazily.

"Other side the hawthorn," he grunted. "Go look."

Spread to dry across the sheep-sorrel, long strips of canvas bore inscriptions red and blue: "Gypsy Fair," "Abram the Magician," "Performing Quadrupeds," "Madge the Egyptian Seeress tells your Future," "Equine Theatre," "Terry the Horseflesh Wonder," "Ride the Gypsy Mare." The boy returned with round eyes alight. Here was the Romany Rye, not in grandfather's book, but in real life.

"Do you — do you keep a seeress?" he cried. "And a real magician?"

"Come here," said the man mysteriously.

"What's wrong with your nose?" He tweaked that organ viciously three times, and produced in swift succession a whittled square of black tobacco, a stag-horn knife, a blue cotton handkerchief. "Beats all," he marveled. "Beats me, Squair, why ye ever stowed those up there! Gettin' hunchback, too, ain't ye? Bend over." Miles felt the man's hand slip beneath his collar, then something cold between the shoulder-blades. "Well, no wonder," said the magician. There in his hand was a bell-mouthed flageolet, with tarnished German-silver keys.

"Are you Abram?" asked the boy, laughing, but a little daunted.

The other nodded. "Onhitch Terry. Now ye watch." Putting the flageolet to his lips, he squealed forth a sprightly air. At the

first notes the pipe-clayed pony reared on his little hind-legs, and, keeping rude time, staggered through a precarious pirouette.

"He can choose colors, too," said his master, when Terry had dropped to all fours, "and add sums, and fire me a pistol, and play me a toon on bells."

"And carry me on his back, standing up," called a treble voice above them. A barefoot girl with strange light-colored hair, and a woman in gray calico, stood on the edge of the grassy crater.

"We're campin' in the cellar," explained Abram, — "my little girl and my wife; she's Madge the Seeress."

"Are you — are you," faltered Miles, fearing to give offense — "are you — Egyptians, please?"

"A descendant o' Pharaoh," said Abram

gravely. "Born on the banks o' the Nile. The Seeress'll tell your fortune. Got any money?"

Miles grew cautious, remembering dark tales.

"No," he said. "That is, hardly any. One twenty-cent piece and a lucky penny."

"Heard some jingle when ye clumb the fence," objected the wizard.

"That was cat—cartridges," retorted Miles, drawing back uneasily.

"For shame, Abe!" interposed the woman. "For shame! We're not in the tent now: no need lyin' to innocents like that. — Come here, my boy," she said kindly.

Miles climbed toward the Seeress, embarrassed and deeply disappointed, Her neat calico, her tired, honest face, smooth gray hair, and friendly eyes were a sore disillusion.

Where were elf-locks and eldritch voice? He had hoped for Meg Merrilies.

"Did you ever hear tell of a Pharaoh named Tucker?" she asked, taking his hand. "Me neither, and that's my husband's name. And if the Nile ever flowed in Sagadahoc County, it run dry 'fore my day." She smoothed his open palm. "No one can tell fortunes, sonny, but I can tell characters. This palm's an honest palm; so take your time, go careful, and you 'll grow to be an honest man. And a clever palm. There's gentle blood in the veins. That always speaks out. A good head, but the heart'll run away with it. Master power o' friendship, few friends. I guess there's danger ahead o' you, but else I'm much mistaken you come o' people fond o' danger. You'll do better by others than yourself —"

"Are you coming to our show?" interrupted the girl. Miles turned shyly. Girls, at Admiral's Light, were rare as horses. And though of about his own age, this was a strange little creature. Her luminous brown eyes seemed at once frank and shy; thoughtfulness in the tanned oval face was changed, by a circumflex arch of eyebrows, to a mischievous, almost elfin gravity; and her hair reminded him of oak leaves in winter, except that they were dead and dull, and this color shone exceedingly alive.

"Coming to our show?" she repeated: "this afternoon, uptown?"

"I can't," he stammered. "We're too — We don't go to many — many entertainments."

Madge the Seeress gave him an odd, shrewd glance of approval.

"Never mind," she said. "Most of our show you've seen already. Would you like to ride the Gypsy Mare, though?" The look on the boy's face answered. "Abe, let him."

The man rose, grumbling, "A free ride, when he's got twenty cents?" but nevertheless disappeared behind the mound, and returned leading a beautiful sleek white mare, already saddled. "No pipe-clay there!" He tightened girth and shortened stirrups. "Up ye go, Squair!"

Miles had ridden Hab Belden's plough-horse once or twice, but never a mount like this. The mare footed among the sorrel, swift and gentle as the fairy charger that cantered over eggs. He pulled up reluctantly, with face glowing.

"A born trooper," said Abram. "Straight

back, close seat, flat thigh, soople. Ye rode her like a gen'ral! Now would ye believe me, Squair, if I spoke but the two words, she'd throw ye like a rocket. Five dollars I offer in open tent for the man or boy that sticks her — and only two ever done it. Want to try? Shall I speak to her?"

"Why, I don't know," began Miles.

"Fraid-cat!" laughed the girl.

"Speak to her," he ordered tartly.

"Throw him, Jubilee!" cried the conjurer.

Miles felt the white body tremble under him, as in terror. With a snort and a swoop, the mare plunged uncontrollably along the brow of the hill, head down, switching herself double from side to side, as a fish fights in a net. Losing his seat, Miles caught it again by blind miracle, just as she spun dizzily and

reared in lightning estrapades. Hereditary instinct, the spirit of the cavalry captain, his father, served him well. Sick with fear — not of a broken neck, but of humiliation before that girl — he clung as in a desperate dream. He felt the back hump like a dromedary's, the close-bunched hoofs pound the earth with quick, disintegrating jars. Some one shouted. He ducked. A hawthorn bough furiously swept his back. The bole of an elm flashed past, and he was conscious of powdered bark smeared on a smarting leg. Then they fought it out, raging mare and raging rider, till with a balk that nearly shot him over her neck, Jubilee stopped dead, and, trembling as when she began, seemed gradually to sink beneath him. He kicked out of stirrups, swung over, fell with a crushing pain in one ankle, and, through an interminable leisure

in which he tasted sour sorrel, rolled clear from the flourishing hoofs.

Roaring blasphemy, the showman had snatched the bridle, and as the white mare rose, was beating her over the head with a cudgel.

"Stop that!" cried Miles, from the ground.

"Roll, will ye?" screamed Abram, showering blows insanely. "Roll, God nourish ye! Never learnt that trick o' me! Roll, ye — Begin that once, an' my theayter's ruined! Roll, ye — "

The woman raised Miles to his feet. "Not hurt, are you? Poor boy! Much hurt?"

"No. Make him stop that!" he whimpered. A white-hot cord tied tighter round his ankle. He limped forward, but the woman seized and carried him toward the fence.

"Go home quick!" she whispered. "I

know him. He'll come at you or me next, if you vex him now. Can you walk? Quick, then, go home. — Here, Anna, see he gets back safe."

Miles found himself in the orchard, dragging painfully, easing his weight by the gun. At each halt the girl eyed him strangely. On the slope above the house he suddenly lay down.

"Rest a minute," he explained through clinched teeth. "I live down there — you need n't come." The tawny hillside swam. His foot seemed to shrink and swell, with alternating torture.

"A thorn's in your cheek," said the girl. "No, the other side." He pulled the sharp point out mechanically. "Did n't that hurt? What's your name?"

"Miles Bissant," he said indifferently. In

a long stillness sounded the dry, faint click of grasshoppers, snapping upward in short arcs roundabout.

"Mine's Anna Hilliard," she volunteered; and after another silence, "I'm sorry I said — that. Good-by."

By her voice, she was crying. Through half-opening eyes, he saw her hair glimmer. Something warm touched his cheek.

He sat up, indignant, rubbing the spot with more energy than if the thorn had stung. A hard patter of bare feet fled up the path.

"What a silly girl!" thought Miles, in disgust. "Glad nobody was round."

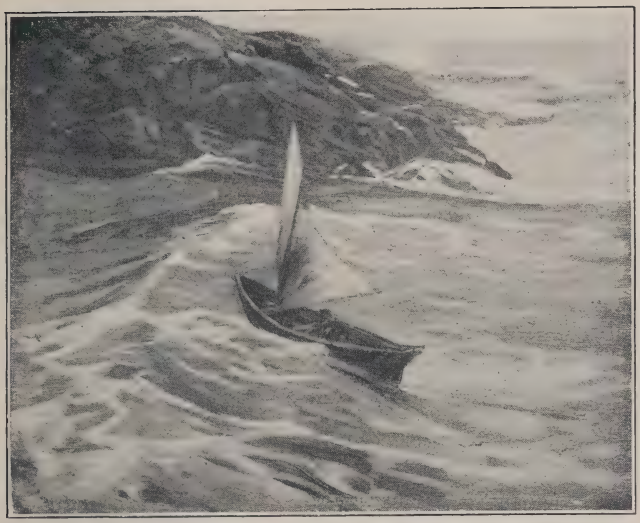
## CHAPTER II

### CAPTAIN FLORIO

"RUNAGATES," said his grandfather, with mournful relish. "I had hoped you — but what's in the blood will out. All runagates!"

Athwart the dim panes of the bedchamber, hackmatack boughs swayed to the chill drone of a dying wind. A rigid profile against twilight, the old man spoke as to some third presence. Often the boy had seen that profile, ploughing a furrow of thought which cast him aside; yet he stirred on his pillows uneasily, almost guiltily.

"So with Christopher," continued the speaker, "and so with your father Godfrey. When they strayed off into the world, what



did they become? A sailor to be drowned and a soldier to be killed. My sons were small comfort."

"My father," objected Miles, timid yet indignant, "was fighting for —"

"And what if he was?" exclaimed his grandfather, turning with a violent start. "Does that excuse you, sir, for scouring the country with gypsy thieves? Eh? And risking your neck at horse-jockey tricks? And lying useless abed this fortnight, while Ella and I do your work at the lights? Next you'll slip off, like them, and then the contract for the light-keeping will be taken away, and I'll become a pauper indeed. Runagates! Eh? What's that? What did you mutter?"

"Nothing, sir," said Miles. He understood now the old man's gloom, and lay still, with long thoughts of pity and contrition.

The rebuke was just: had he not been lying here, his head full of day-dreams, plans, vainglorious romance? He could ride — he had proved that; he loved the sea with an inborn longing. Which, then, was the better life, soldier's or sailor's? Dull peace at home, he had thought, was not to be endured. The brief spice of action, of danger, had so edged his fancy that the whole fortnight had passed among conjured shapes of adventure: brigantines navigated through seas not in the atlas, coral islands raised against the dawn, typhoons weathered, cannibals beaten off — were these better than a red whirl of cavalry, with trumpets, with sabres, with leather creaking like Jubilee's saddle? The choice had seemed, at times, easy and immediate. And now grandfather had somehow scolded him to his senses. He could not put the new

emotion into words, but in a flash he had seen that this pictured joy of living was the mere pride of life.

"What 's wrong?" grumbled the old man.

"Ankle twinged. Nothing," replied Miles. He could not explain what brightness had died out. — Ella's step mounted toward them, and the shadow spokes of banisters wheeled in a striped flange across the ceiling, before he spoke again.

"Don't worry about all that, grandfather."

The advice, the audacity, surprised them both; neither was aware that between boyhood and youth a door had closed forever.

Closed it had, nevertheless, and Miles, when afoot once more and outdoors, wondered vaguely at the change in his little world. Frost-bitten fields, white-caps on the border river, birch groves and maple shifting their

bleak reticulation against a sky that threatened snow, — these formed a background for new and sober thoughts. He had lost the conviction that his future must be different, transplanted and transformed, bright with surprise, excitement, and good fortune. All that was nonsense. Here lay his life, studying by day, trudging by night down to the twin lamps; for variety, he wore now his threadbare reefer, now his mittens and great helmet of moth-eaten fur; now plodded on snowshoes over drifts, where powdered gold puffed upward, at each step, into the lantern-light; now cleared the tower windows of damp snowflakes; now waded in hip-boots through pools of freshet. One deeply starred spring night, he surprised himself recalling that the girl's name was different from Abram's. "Perhaps she was adopted," he thought, as

he sniffed the damp sweetness of reviving earth, " or an orphan, like me." On the heels of this, he could excuse her folly: "I was hurt, of course, and she felt sorry that she'd stumped me. Perhaps Abram would beat her, too —" Why should he speculate, so long afterward, about persons whom he would never see again?

The next years saw him grow into a young man, silent, grave, with a tranquillity that a stranger might have mistaken for contentment. On one point, indeed, he was contented: his grandfather, who had rebuked his father's memory, could find no major fault with the second generation.

One June evening he lay stretched on the mouldered planks of the Admiral's deck, a book of next day's lessons opened flat before him. A sunset swarm of midges, down-sifted

by a breath of air, suddenly confused Euclid's lines and dots with a dance of jigging motes. Miles swept an impatient hand, glanced off the page, and forgot both insects and trapezoids. A boat was making straight toward him, — a green "lap-streak" dinghy, rowed by some Yankee from across the river, and carrying on the stern thwart a jaunty passenger in light gray. No sooner had the boat nosed the undulating fringe of seaweed than the stranger sprang nimbly to the rocks, and scrambled over their slippery, tangled hummocks, in a diagonal course up the beach. He disappeared under a shoulder of the bank, and, as Miles still lay wondering, suddenly emerged from the firs beside the old quarter-deck.

"Hello!" he said, with an odd, pleasant intonation. "May I come in? Jolly little

nook for reading, have n't you? No, don't get up. Just tell me how to strike the path to the house, above there, will you?"

Except the tender's gig, no boat ever touched at Admiral's Light. No such visitor, certainly, had landed within Miles's recollection. Burly but active, with the body of a blacksmith or pugilist clad in pale gray flannels of a knowing, worldly cut, he seemed at once young and mature, sophisticated and breezily adventurous. The same hand which held two primly folded gloves bore on its back a foul anchor tattooed in blue. Bright gray eyes in a swarthy face, clean cutwater profile, reckless good-humor playing about the lips, bespoke one who had taken a man's share of life with a boy's share of amusement.

"Do you know the old gentleman that lives

up there?" he continued. "Your grandfather, eh? Well, now, perhaps you can tell me. Had he a relative named Christopher?"

"That was my uncle," said Miles, getting to his feet.

"The dickens! You!" cried the stranger, and grasped his hand. "You! Does n't that beat the merry Hell — elujah? You Kit Bissant's nephew! He stood up for me when I was a prentice your size. Ever hear him tell about Florio? Tony Florio? No? That's so, why should he? His nephew, by Jove! Is n't it a funny little world, though?" With twinkling eyes, he studied the boy's face, then turned abruptly. "I'm off to tackle the old gentleman. See you later!"

His footsteps rang hollow and distant on the gully footbridge. Miles, listening, felt unreasonably glad. Unreasonably, as often,

in spite of all geography, a long hill suggests a hidden prospect of plain or ocean, as a turn of woodland road beckons to some joyful ambush or far-thought pilgrimage, so the landfall of this stranger, the alacrity and vigor of his contact, promised immediate events. Just what events, the youth, with all his eager surmise while climbing homeward through attenuate shadows, could not guess.

Their evening meal — a haddock usually, with cornbread, tea, berries, or cheese-cakes — the old man always called dinner, and further dignified by appearing in the crumpled broadcloth and linen of a bygone generation. To-night he entered with even greater solemnity, leading to their bare little table the sun-burned man in gray.

"My grandson Miles, Captain Florio," he said. And bending his fierce old countenance

toward the one flickering candle, he added in the same breath: "For the bounty of the present day, and of all days past and to come, we thank thee, O Lord, and now seek thy blessing." With the same stiff ceremony, he did the honors for the haddock, presided over the raspberries, and ignored the flustered awkwardness of Ella.

The stranger appeared to enjoy both his fare and his company.

"Beautiful country hereabout, Mr. Bissant," he declared heartily. "Beautiful, by George! Shore life for me, if 't was all like this. I tell you, Miles, we'll have a jolly time together. Show me your lighthouses tomorrow night, will you? Right! What are they, fixed? You know, once when I was wrecked off the Hook of Indramaiu —"

He rambled into stories of orient and tropic

seas. Had they been of anthropophagi and antres vast, Miles could have listened no more hungrily; for even at second hand, this was the life which he once had dreamed. The sole incredibility was that such a brilliant tropic wanderer should now shine out in their gloomy, sequestered house. The mountain had come to Mahomet, the world to a captive. His grandfather, visiting Miles at bedtime, brought explanation.

"My boy," he said — and for the first time in their life together he spoke with hesitation, almost as though making excuses to an equal — "my boy, Captain Florio is to be our — that is, hmm! well, our lodger." Frowning at the candle flame, he brought out the word defiantly. "I should never consent to this — mercenary relation, but it seems — he was a friend of my son Christopher's. He

will stay with us for some time. It's — it's unnecessary to say more. Good-night."

Humiliation underlay the speech — humiliation which Miles felt dimly, but could not share. A lodger's money, even a damaged pride, counted little against the change from apathy to interest, from silence to fireside and table talk, from routine to variety. Next morning, indeed, five minutes after lessons, Miles had forgotten that the relation was mercenary.

"Hello," Florio hailed him. In jersey and puttees, he looked like some heavy-weight amateur training in retirement. "Look here, how's this? Caught Ella carrying water uphill from that gully below. There's a spring above." He waved up toward the site of the burned mansion.

"That hill 's too steep," said Miles.

"Ho-ho!" laughed the other. "You're a bright boy, are n't you, now? Come along topside with me."

Two joyful days followed, in which they built a little wooden aqueduct from the Admiral's Spring down to a trough at Ella's very door. When nails gave out, the seafarer joined their supports with marvelous temporary lashings. "Chinese trick," he grinned. "Now we'll run the flowage down into your gully. How's that, señor?"

With ties no less secure he had bound Miles to admiration, as much by his manual cunning, his boyish enthusiasm for practical designs, as by his galloping accompaniment of strange tales. Hammering or sawing like a born carpenter, he recalled sharp, flashing pictures of life in antipodes, — pearl-divers in Polynesia, "sun-downers," mutinous coo-

lies at sea, plague-stricken pilgrims to Mecca dying like flies, aboard ship; midnight murderers in sampans.

"Damn it, no Captains and Misters!" he cried once. "There, I did n't mean — your grandfather 'll ship me off for swearing! But call me Tony. Let's be chums."

Chums, therefore, they became, though not without capitulation. The lighthouses first showed them certain differences.

"Do you mean," cried the wanderer, as they stood, one evening, in the glare of the lamp-room, "do you mean to say you leave a warm bed twice every night to watch these two tame lightning-bugs? Let 'em burn, boy! Get your sleep. What the devil, they'll not go out; or if they did, who'd know? Must be as many as one schooner a fortnight

pass that ledge after dark. Ho, ho! You stay in bed!"

"But it's our agreement," Miles protested.

The sailor's gray eyes twinkled.

"Roman sentinel, eh? That's nonsense, boy. Take your beauty sleep. Let 'em burn."

"Why, 't would n't be honest," said the young keeper, somewhat shocked.

"Honest?" jeered Florio. Then his tone changed. "Oh, well, no harm done. Strict ideas — I s'pose somebody's bound to have 'em. Tough on you, all the same."

The upshot of their argument was that with high good-nature Tony insisted on making the last rounds himself. "I'm used to night work. This is my pidgin. You go to bed."

The volunteer was faithful. Often thereafter, waking by force of habit at midnight or three in the morning, Miles rose from his pillow to watch, for a luxurious instant, the sailor's lantern bobbing along through underbrush far below. He dropped asleep with drowsy gratitude. Yet in spite of kindness and the ascendency of experience, his new friend left something unfinished, dubious, unexplained. To grandfather, the man was another commercial contract like the lightkeeping, a fender against evil days, a presence courteously tolerated; to Ella — and, through her, perhaps, to the outer world — a "visitin' gentleman," friend of the late Captain Christopher; to Miles, a frank companion and — what?

Why should a man in the thirties, ebullient and a rover, suddenly choose to vegetate?

Grandfather had called him "Mercury Resting." For all his cheerful enthusiasm, the sailor could care little about their northern valley, the sad, rugged beauty of their border. When Miles proposed a favorite tramp, he had replied: "Kilmarnock Brook? What's to see there? Nothing but scenery." Nor could books dull the edge of his restlessness. "No, thank you. Not much on reading," he replied, when grandfather gave him the freedom of the meagre "library." And later, out of doors, he explained to Miles: "Print's nearly all lies. Now *them*, why, every day, right in the open air, you can meet live men that'll tell you *them* — fresh lies, not old ones, — and act 'em out to boot. So why rack eyesight over print?" Meantime, he taught Miles to box, and with his aid rebuilt the kitchen chimney, pruned the deserted or-

chard, shored up the Admiral's quarter-deck. Yet these employments could not last.

Again, he had said, "I'm alone in the world." And yet after a tranquil month, he was plainly fretting about letters. He and Miles often traversed the river road, up hill and down, to the half-deserted village of Kilmarnock; and always on the final crest, the red granite ledge where, sudden as a night-hawk's downward wheel, the freed vision of the climbers fell wide over a landward prospect, following toward the sunset alternate wedges of bright water and black crenelated headlands, — there, always, the sailor paused and sat down.

"I'll smoke here," he said. "Great view, eh? Land and water, land and water — in layers, like Ella's chocolate pie o' Sundays."

Then, nodding toward the slate-gray houses clustered far below in a meadow cove: "You go on down and ask. May be a letter, this time."

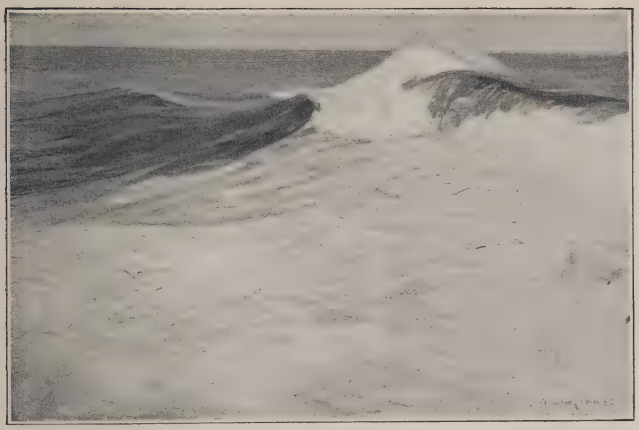
Once, when Miles clambered up again, empty-handed as ever, the sailor sat musing.

"Can you keep a secret?" he asked, with a glance at once introverted and shrewd. "We 're mates, are n't we? Right, then. You 're the sort a man can trust. If a stranger comes asking for me, or any foreign-looking man, you know, you keep your tongue at home, and come straight to me, first. I 'll tell you why, some day. Long story —"

He watched a slim pillar of smoke rising from a cottage chimney, out of evening shadow, to vanish in the breeze on their glow-

ing height. Then he sprang up, and started briskly homeward.

"Sometimes, you know," he said, when they had scrambled down hill for a furlong, "sometimes, at sea, a man makes enemies."



## CHAPTER III

### THE SAFFRON MAN

As warmth in a dying man, so life in the village of Kilmarnock had retreated from the extremities. Gray cabins stood for the most part with sunken roof and yawning window; here and there, where a wall had fallen out, they exposed, as for the stage purposes of some unacted melodrama, the intimacy of all their little rooms at once, — the ragged wall-paper, the zigzag mounting scar of stairs long vanished, the hearthstones choked, in winter with snow, as now with autumn chickweed. Beyond these dead environs, a brook, with cool and hearty noises, tumbled out of its brown alder-shadow to halt, slacken, and

wriggle in a delta of deep-channeled rivulets through seaweed and long mud-flats. And here, where fairy falls descended to that vile foreshore, the heart of the village beat feebly in a half-dozen houses, weather-silvered.

In the post-office, — a littered, gloomy shed which was also carpenter's shop, wheelwright's factory, and woolen mill, — a few sad old men sat always, talking slowly and vaguely; while underneath, the roaring brook made the floor-boards vibrate, and flashed through chinks and knot-holes the whiteness of cascade foam.

"Mornin', Miles," wheezed Mr. Quinn, the postmaster. An elephantine man, — old Mr. Bissant called him Quinbus Flestrin, after the man-mountain Gulliver, — he rummaged with slow, fat hands in Her Majesty's salt-box. "Here's that letter you folks be'n

waitin' for," he puffed. "Did n't know you had relations over there, neither. Poor hand they write, I must say. Oh, *now* I ketch it! 'A. Florio, *Es*-quair.' That's him that's stayin' up to your place, ain't it?"

Miles nodded, all impatience.

"'Care of Richard Bissant, *Es*-quair,'" read Quinbus gravely, holding the letter at different lengths of focus. "Say, they tell me he *ain't* a boarder, after all! Now, I thought he might be a rusticator, like the city feller to Lovat's that's got the narvous prostrates. They say his fingers fidges dretful, that feller."

Miles listened politically, and was at last rewarded with Tony's letter.

"Hear ye got noo neighbors down your way," began Quinbus, but his auditor escaped.

His news, moreover, went unheeded; for in three steps down the grass-ribbed street Miles overtook a surprise. A little man trundling a keg of nails in a barrow set down the handles with a sigh, and turned. His hair was grayer, his cheek engraved with deeper lines, his aspect less cheerful and thriving; but the swart face and shifting black eyes were those of Abram the Magician.

It was like a piece of boyhood restored. Halting, Miles ventured the question, —

"Is n't your name Tucker, sir?"

"What if 't is?" growled the man, defiant and suspicious.

"Oh, nothing," rejoined Miles, taken aback. "Only I rode your mare Jubilee once —"

"Dessay," snapped Abram. He spat on his hands, stooped to the shafts of his barrow, and growled, "Lots o' lummockses did.

Damn 'er hide! Dunno that's reason to hender a man's work."

"Or to be uncivil," Miles retorted stiffly, taking a leaf from his grandfather's book of pride. But it was with a chuckle that he passed on, and swung into the path along the shore.

It was a bright Saturday morning of late September. Across the border a thin haze of forest fires, from "back lots" far behind the river hills, veiled the high, resolute contours of the American shore; but in all other quarters the air shone clear and buoyant, mellow but cordial, like the sweetness of a frosty apple. Goldenrod along his path had ripened to a higher, drier yellow; seaweed on the rocks below — that turned the broad flats into a "rookery" of shaggy forms, petrified in the act of basking — seemed to have lost

the greenish tinge from its leathern brown; ahead, down the sparkling vista of the river, the bay, by a sleight of mirage, raised islands a hair's-breadth above the horizon, till beneath them sea and sky joined with that pale, stretched continuity seen in downward-parting drops. A world unclouded and untroubled: yet the sky held the growing whiteness that foreruns autumnal wind, and a loon, winging high with bedlam laughter, steered his flight by the flight of an unrisen gale.

Miles loitered, yet was busy rather with thought than sight. What could bring Abram to Kilmarnock? The fat postmaster would have not only mentioned a "show," but discussed it tediously; where, then, were Terry and Jubilee, and Madge the Seeress, and the little barefoot girl? His sudden sharp curi-

osity, above all on this last head, astonished him. Why should he care? — yet he continued to speculate.

His path skirted among sweet-fern, mullein, and pink granite. The little fir promontory, roughly double-serrate like the edge of an elm leaf, suddenly hid the upper lighthouse, for shore and path bent sharp into Alward's Cove. Here a deserted house stood at the grassy mouth of an ancient watercourse; and behind it, a grove of slender white birches had already begun to shed yellow leaves, which so carpeted the dark, strait hollow that a sunlight seemed to glow faintly upward.

Suddenly Miles saw that new shingles patched the cabin, and that from the chimney curled blue wisps of smoke. A battered "punt" lay hauled above the thin rubbish line of high water. But what most deeply

surprised him, the beginnings of a weir straggled down the beach. He laughed aloud. The stakes were freshly driven, but the cedar poles green-coated with many tides; on old material the builder had exerted an inexperience glaring even in these first few yards; and more than all, Alward's Cove, a narrow cleft half a mile above low water, was for a weir the worst possible situation.

Glancing up at the patched house, he cut his laughter short. Behind the panes a girl's face vanished into the gloom. The features he could not have sworn to, but the hair shone indubitably bright. Ashamed to be caught mocking her weir, he set out again briskly; and he had rounded the little promontory before confusion cleared into the surprising knowledge that he was glad of something. These were the neighbors of

whom Quinbus would have told; the keg of nails was for that absurd, futile weir; and her hair *was* of the color of winter oak leaves. Why, again, should he care? — but care he did, even to excitement, with an obscure feeling that his acts, even his thoughts, now had as it were a witness, and that now any day could promise pleasant and unexpected turns. He could not account for this glowing satisfaction, — that some one had become mysteriously involved and identified, in his mind, with the bright, volatile strangeness of autumn.

On the doorsteps at home, Tony smoked his pipe.

"Ah, the beggar's written at last," he grumbled; then unfolding a single sheet, read it calmly, without comment. Miles, who had always vaguely connected this

coming letter with "enemies made at sea," was disappointed to see no more change in Florio's dark face than in his later behavior.

Weeks passed without incident. Miles went daily to the village for mail which was never there, and of which the sailor declared no expectation. He returned down river always by the shore path—"to see how the weir gets along," he told himself stubbornly. It got along slowly, from bad to worse. Sometimes he saw the magician, far out, ankle-deep in mud, hammering stakes, or weaving brush wattles into his foredoomed structure. Once the blue of a calico dress moved among the white birch pillars. Speech of his new neighbors, however, or nearer view, he did not get. No face lurked behind the window-pane. And at home the fir head-

land sundered them as effectually as the rim of a hemisphere.

One night, at his nine-o'clock visit to the upper light, he paused for a time in the lamp-room, his back to the glare, looking out into the dark. Something — perhaps the silence of the evening, the calm, so great that the other tower's light pierced the water deeply, like an inverted point of exclamation — induced lonely and melancholy thoughts. As he stood thus, a sound rose through the open trap-door. Something stirred, thinly and dryly, on the stairs below.

At first like faintly tearing silk, or scuffing sand-paper, it mounted. Footsteps, thought Miles; yet such footsteps as he had never heard, uncertain, soft, and of a person neither shod nor barefoot.

They stopped. A harsh yet guarded call

followed. If speech, it was no human tongue. Miles waited, in a profound silence. A voice called in strange sing-song; then nearer, chanting what sounded like a fragment of barbarous melody.

Portuguese and Italian sailors Miles had seen, on rare visits aboard some lumber schooner bound for Sicily or the Canary Islands. At Admiral's Light, however, nothing could bring them ashore, still less up into the tower. And this sing-song gabble, as instinct told him, came from no Latin throat.

The dry, scuffing steps began once more. Suddenly, out of the darkness, claw-like fingers clutched the sides of the trap-door, — fingers of an impossible, horny yellow, ending in blue talons.

For one spasmodic instant, Miles, had he

stood on open ground, might have bolted. Then as up from a pit, a reassuring black felt hat bobbed through the opening, and tilted back to disclose a human face. Eyes hard and bright as black glass peered from under lids curiously in-folded, of double thickness; the saffron cheeks were smooth as a babe's; and indeed, in that strange face, as in a changeling's, baby innocence conflicted with reptilian age and wisdom. Without alteration, without sound, it rested there for a moment, at the level of the floor, as though decapitated; then sank from sight.

Miles had stared in fascination. Waking to anger, part at his own fear, part at its cause, he shouted: —

"Stop! Who — what are you after?"

The light scuffing descended rapidly. Miles leapt for the black square, plunged through

it, and down the twisting stair. The thin scantling shook and buckled under their double weight. He jumped the lower steps, just as the tower door slammed open to let a black figure bound out into the lantern light. A scurrying pair of thick white soles, as he caught up the lantern by the bail, guided his pursuit; he gained on them, and running his hardest to the gully bridge, gripped in his right hand the fluttering fullness of a silken jacket.

"Stop!" he cried. "You —"

The fugitive tugged, wriggled, surrendered, and turned a grinning face.

"No can do," he panted, nodding and ducking amiably. The felt hat was gone, and his bobbing crown showed a high, shaven forehead, bound with neat black coils of braided hair. "But in pictures they hang

down," thought Miles. "A queue!" He had never before seen a Chinaman.

"What do you want?" he asked severely.

His captive, smiling and nodding, the calmer of the two, repeated, —

"No can do, no can do."

Plainly, the man's English went no further. Miles released his grip, and, feeling rather foolish, stepped back to consider. Like a spring released, and with instant, mechanical precision, the Chinaman vaulted the bridge-rail, landed on the steep bank below, and darted upward, crashing into the alders. His escape, like his first appearance, had the facility of acts in a dream.

Flushed and bewildered, Miles was half-way home before he regained the use of reason. At a clap the thought overtook him, What if this were Tony's "foreign-looking"

enemy? "I'd better make sure first," he told himself; and sitting by the library fire, he kept as thoughtful a silence as his grandfather and the sailor, perched, with intent faces, over their chessmen.

At bedtime, he stepped across into Florio's little room.

"News for you," he began quietly, and continued in an undertone. Florio's hard gray eyes watched him sharply across the candle flame, with a look which meant, if anything, impatient anger.

An explosive whisper was the only comment: "Damn the coolie!" Pocketing his big fists with one energetic shove, the sailor stared down at the floor.

"Thanks all the same, of course," he said moodily. "Quite right. That's the chap I was afraid might turn up. Thanks. Don't

speak of him to anybody else, till I say so, will you? Not a word? That's right."

He sat down on his bed, and unwound his leggings, neatly, methodically, as though the affair were dropped.

In some surprise, Miles continued it.

"Then I'll do my turns to-night, and afterward — the lamps."

"Eh?" The sailor looked up, half startled, half chagrined. "What's that? — Oh," he smiled indulgently, "not much! Get to bed, boy. What, I'm not afraid of *that* swine! Alone, is n't he? Let me lay aboard him once, that's all! Can catch! No, I won't hear a word of it. Your watch below. To bed!"

By no persuasion would he forego his self-set labor, or accept company, even for the single night. "Dear chap, I have *some* pride,"

he reiterated; and as he offered no confidences, Miles left him with disappointment. Yet his cool, stubborn attitude seemed, in a way, admirable; and — to judge from deep, contented breathing, across the corridor — he slept like a child.

Somewhere after midnight, Miles woke uneasily. Long security had broken the habit; but now he sat up once more, to watch the distant light of Tony's lantern jerking in fitful eclipse among the firs. Near the second tower it disappeared, as usual; and as usual, after a short pause shining out again, returned down river, skipping and winking.

Suddenly it went out, and shone no more.

Miles crept from bed to window, and watched. He counted off three, four, five minutes, and saw not another gleam. Dismayed, blaming himself for suffering Tony

to have his way, he wrestled into clothes, stole downstairs, and raced through the sharp night air. Thin fog, shoulder-high, had just begun to billow along the ground, concealing and magnifying, even by starlight. Each tussock, each baby fir, loomed like a waiting figure or stretched like a dead body. Silent over the wet grass, Miles ran downhill toward the spot where the light had ceased.

Nearing the shore, he brushed through the chill aspersion of bristling thickets, when suddenly the light gleamed again, fixed, through the lowest boughs. He stopped, listened, then slipped forward cautiously, toward a murmur of voices. Subdued but unmistakable, it was the broken sing-song of that speech from the other side of the world. He threaded without a sound the

interstitial windings of the underbrush, and crouched at the edge of the clearing.

On the old quarter-deck, the lantern burned dimly. As in a luminous smoke, two men sat talking, with now and then a gesture that set enormous hands, outspread fingers, wavering on the magic-lantern screen of the fog. Their alien tones rose and fell, in a quiet, scolding incantation.

The more vehement speaker was Tony. Facing him, oddly squatting upon heels, the yellow man of the tower nodded continually, amicably, sagely, like a toy mandarin.

## CHAPTER IV

### PAN'S PIPES

At breakfast Tony discoursed readily as ever, smiled as engagingly, with glances no less frank, provocative, or droll. Twice he forced old Mr. Bissant to brighten his cloudy morning face, to smite with open palm his short white curls, and chuckle; once, even, to parry joke with joke. But Miles sat dazed and unhappy. Their little house, lacking so many things, had lacked also the presence of a lie; before that presence, now, he came awkwardly, and as it were with eyes averted. He heard Tony laugh, saw the white flash of his teeth, the quick, foreign heave of his burly shoulders, the nameless turns of speech and look by which friend signals to friend;

he knew Tony for the same man of yesterday, challenging the same admiration; yet between himself and all this, a single night had stretched a dismal vacuum, a distance slight, but both intensive and insulating. The sudden change puzzled him abominably.

"An Italianate Englishman," his grandfather descanted, "they used to call a devil incarnate. I leave it to fancy what an Italian who —"

"Aha, but I'm not!" cried Tony warmly. "I have you there. My father was Italian born, yes. That's only half. And me, bless you, I sailed out on an English ship a twelve-year-old. Under the same flag ever since. An English deck is English soil. Come now, Mr. Bissant, to be honest—"

While their debate ran high, Miles slipped quietly from the room.

Last night's fog had poured up the channel, overflowed the hills, and now submerged all but the smoky loom of the hackmatack pillars, as Miles passed between them. Sea-rime silvered his rough jacket; from beneath wet eyelashes he peered into motionless, white space; the very hill underfoot was a declivity felt, not seen. He wandered slowly down it, hands in pockets, head bent.

To be honest! Tony's chance phrase recurred ironically; and after it, his saying on the hill above Kilmarnock, "You're the sort a man can trust." With what? thought Miles bitterly: with lies, calculated, shaped as confidences. He had not known, before, how utterly the older man had captured his liking; or how, divorced from belief, liking could become reproach. A raw simpleton, to lend a stranger his heart!

In this mood he found himself halting, without purpose, on the Admiral's quarter-deck. From the rail he saw neither rocks nor river, but only the globular, spiny tufts of young Norway pines that stepped down toward the beach. Wind-slanted, rooted in crevices, they lent their fixity as a gauge to sight: their needles, carding sluggish vapor, freed the spellbound air; formlessness became texture; and fleecy filaments dissolving, twining, blending, thick as the smoke of wet brushwood, set the whole snowy void adrift in level motion. Somewhere, far below in the bay, a whistle mournfully bellowed. Nearer home, but deep in the fog, sounded the unsteady bumping of a single oar.

"Hallo-o-o!" The rowing stopped; and a moment later the same high, clear voice called, "Hallo-o-o!"

Miles trumpeted through his hands an answering hail.

"Oh!" cried the rower, with evident relief. "Hallo again. Are you a vessel or the shore?"

"I'm the shore," laughed Miles. "What's wrong?"

"I'm lost out here." The voice, floating across the hidden surface, rang clear as from the throat of a singer. "One oar went overboard, and the more I pull, the faster this thing goes round and round. And the tide's running down — out, I mean — and I'm frightened." The bumping noise broke in again, and again ceased. "No use! Hallo! Why, now you're clear round on the *other* side!"

"Stay where you are!" cried Miles eagerly. "Wait. There's no danger. I'll come out and tow you."

He scrambled down to the beach, and along it to where Tony, for no apparent use, maintained a small boat moored on an endless rope. Hauling home till the black bow came cleaving the fog, he ordered peremptorily, —

"Keep on shouting, there! What's the matter with you? How can I find —"

"I was just thinking," replied the voice calmly, from no great distance. "If you come out, you may get lost, too."

Miles cast off, and jumped in.

"On this river?" He laughed somewhat breathlessly, half at the warning, half at a strange excitement which had mastered him. This drifting voice he had known, from the first hail, to be a girl's; what girl's, he had nearly guessed from the second; and pulling vigorous oars, he was not surprised to see,

after blind exploration and shouting, the square bow of the magician's punt focusing from out the heavy smoke.

Bareheaded, half turned on a thwart, and peering anxiously through that smoke, sat a misty figure, whose light, strong lines of active youth not even a man's cardigan jacket could muffle. She gave a little cry of deliverance.

"It's fine of you —" Something cut her praise curiously short, just as gunwale swept gunwale.

"Come aboard," said Miles. Sheepish, and suddenly flushed, he found himself out of all measure preoccupied with an unshipped oar. "Careful. Step in the middle," he added mechanically. His outstretched hand met a warm, firm little grasp, in the same delighted instant that two ankles, quick and

slender as the feathered ankles of mythology, whipped over into the bottom of the boat.

"Make fast your painter," he ordered, shipping his oar in a dream.

"Make my what?" cried his passenger anxiously. He managed at last to look up, and saw her darting puzzled glances into the punt. Cold vapors wavered about her hair thinly, as though conquered and dispersed by lambent brightness.

"Tie the rope," he translated.

"Oh, this!" She obeyed, her nimble fingers rosy with the cold, her shining head bent so zealously over the knot as to show but one brown cheek transparently aglow with exercise.

Watching this with unbounded pleasure, he gave way. The punt fell behind, swung

dimly into their wake; the rope rose taut and dripping; and as though satisfied with her knot, the girl suddenly faced him, brushing from her forehead an obstinate tendril of bright hair.

"Thank you for coming," she said quietly. "I don't — I don't know anything about boats."

Again a fragment of boyhood restored: he met that look of elfin gravity, under the wide circumflex of eyebrows, more formidable than bows bent against him.

"How did you get lost?" he ventured in confusion; and, meaning kindness, was dismayed to hear the question ring like a rebuke.

"Weir-poles — a whole lot drifted out of our cove," she answered, with a flutter of the same confusion. "He had worked so

hard — It was a pity to lose so many. I had to come out after them. He was — is n't very well."

"Your father?" asked Miles.

"Yes," replied the girl uncertainly. Another flush, a deeper color in her cheeks, allowed him to guess at Abram's illness. "No; I call him that, but—he's all I have; and she was so good to me — his wife. She sent me to school winters, and would n't let — as long as she lived —"

Her words, lingering unfinished, her look penetrating the hidden distances of the fog, seemed to dismiss a memory down some long vista.

"Were you afraid?" said Miles, between strokes.

"Of course I was," she laughed. Her instant change of mood, her glance swiftly

returning to close quarters, but above all the radiant conflict about lips and eyes, the honest mischief and shy directness, struck him into a panic joy. No countenance had ever looked so quick with various meaning, so tremulous with color, so dangerously awake and alive, as her face now in this floating dawn, this cold, nebulous, elemental light of the sea mist. It was a discovery in his life, a mystery, and a power. He could have ferried her to the farthest continent.

"Afraid?" she said. "What else? I thought I was slipping out into the big ocean. And the fog all round! It was like — like sitting alone with a lot of years. I thought of my sins!"

"You can't have many." The words sprang from impulse, free admiration; he could have hammered out no compliments;

but she willfully mistook him, and laughed his honesty aside.

"Ah now, what a tongue you have!" And with a provoking smile, bending aside her look, she studied the smoky water that drew astern. Under the gray cardigan jacket, her slight, active body in the blue calico reminded him oddly of nacre shining in some uncouth shell, or of hazelnuts when frost has split the rough beard.

A strange motive, as strong as it was new, forced him to say: —

"The first time I saw you —" All conclusion suddenly failed him. "Do you remember it?"

"Remember?" Again, and more deeply, she watched the slow sweep of the current; and more deeply her blood tinted the sunburned, oval face. She tossed her head with

a little shake, more of impatience than of denial. "No, I — I can't remember."

Disappointed, frustrated, he rowed for a space in silence, knowing that the full career of their speech had swerved awry. In a twinkling she had withdrawn to a lamentable distance.

"But Jubilee?" persisted Miles. "And Terry, and the dog — what became —"

"All sold," answered the girl curtly. "When she died. Sold off. Poor little old Terry!" For a moment she sat alone with her thoughts; then suddenly lifting her head, listened.

"What's that?" Her tone was hard as business. "Do you hear it?"

Miles heard, and not without anxiety. A steady, muffled puffing sound labored doggedly nearer through the fog. Against an ebb-tide that raced for the bay and open sea,

he had rowed indifferently, his arms working, but his thoughts inclining to let the boat drift. In the charmed isolation of the fog, it had become, for the instant, a barge of glory, a shallop of dreams. Awake now, he recognized that the "back-eddy" which swept the shore toward Alward's Cove had not yet seized their keel; that they were still in the channel; that the channel was none too wide, and the approaching noise none too far astern. He swung full power on his port oar.

"What is it?" repeated the girl, peering over her shoulder.

"Trim the boat," he commanded. "Can't tell. We're all right."

But of this he felt by no means sure. The steady "puff-puff" throbbed more and more distinct, and with it came a wide whisper of rushing water. The vagueness of all direc-

tion told him that to shout, in this thick obscurity, would only alarm his passenger. He tugged mightily across the current, hoping for the sudden wrench of the counter-eddy. It did not grasp them. Instead, the noise fought closer, truculent and panting; the whisper of rushing surfaces widened and sharpened, more and more sibilant.

A silent explosion seemed to hoist the laggard stern of the punt, which instantly, as though stung into live hatred, came crashing along their port side, crowding and struggling like a horse that fights his mate in harness. Struck by this trough of whirling suds, an oar shot into the air. With a stagger, the boat careened as to capsize, slewed violently on a soft upheaval. Through the mist, a pear-shaped bag of woven cordage stole past like a phantom, above a low black bulwark;

at interminable intervals, three heavy stakes filed along, almost overhead, — fenders hanging parallel at the same forward slant. Their boat, righting dizzily, leaped once, cramped and awkward as a sheep jumping a wall. And they were left pitching on a foamy wake, smothered in the smell of steam, wrapped by a warm mist invisible in a cold.

"The oar! The oar!" cried Miles.

Long afterward, he admired her instant foresight. She had already caught the oar-blade, just as it bobbed past in hissing lather. The tug steadily puffed farther into the distance, and — now that their need was over — began again the hoarse bellowing which Miles had heard in the bay. For some moments, exchanging a queer smile that conveyed more than utterance, each saw the other's face

touched, through the gleaming fog, with a light still more pale and northern.

"Bail her out," said Miles, nodding at the half-filled punt, while he wrestled with broken thole-pins. When at last they were under way, it was in silence.

And yet danger had advanced each in the other's knowledge, by that shared experience which was more than words, presence, or time—so savage, so close upon the happy side of life, had flashed the traitorous. Hidden together on the river, in a privacy of space, they had heard the pipes of Pan the gracious, and now Pan the terrible had "stamped his hoof in the night thicket."

The waves of their enemy's wake broke widely along the shore, with a pleasant sound as of the sea, but roving and transitory. The eddy at last eased the laboring oars. And

by some mystery of the air, the fog began to blur and dissolve, to rise from a clearing circle of water, from the shaggy, wallowing rocks, the pink granite walls, the sombre undergrowth, till the fir-tops reared like a parapet in the thick of a siege, with ragged embrasures and sharp merlons bosomed in the smoke of cannonades.

"Almost home," said Miles. And while he spoke, numberless floating bladders of seaweed brushed beneath, clogged the speed of their boat, and then let it pass into clear water at Alward's. The weir, a string of cedar poles, like the tops of a sunken fence, ran a broken parallel to their shoreward course.

"Stop a minute," begged the girl.

Very willingly he backed water, then rested his oars.

"Before we get within hearing." She eyed him with grave decision. "I've been worried, and I want your — somebody's advice." Lowering her voice, she glanced at the weir: "Could a man make his living by that?"

Miles shook his head gloomily.

"Never in the world. I'm sorry, but —"

"Thanks. I thought so," she interrupted. "I told him, but he does n't seem to care. What will become — " Her smile was friendly but sad. "I'm breaking orders: the one thing he won't let me do is to talk to strangers."

"Are we?" said Miles, more gloomily.

"You know we are," she answered, looking down. "In one way, no. If that thing had passed over us, out there —" The gray cardigan did not hide a passing shiver. For a time her bright head remained drooping.

"No, we're not. I'll ask you. Do you know a man named Florio?"

"Do I?" he cried. "He lives with us, down there!"

"What is he?" she asked eagerly. "What does he do?"

"Nothing," answered Miles, with a puzzled scowl. "I — I don't know."

"He and my father seem," she began, then paused. "Has he anything to do with fish — with herring?"

"Except to eat them!" Laughing at her incongruous picture of Tony, Miles suddenly felt a new and curious pang. "Do you like him?"

She would not look up.

"I — I hate him!" Her answer trembled with vehemence. "Row, please. Quick, I must get home!"

He gave way once more, unaccountably glad. The bow, lifting, grated in sludgy sand. Neither spoke until he had dragged the magician's punt well up the beach. Though standing nearly shoulder-high beside him, she had grown, as if at the touch of land, magically smaller; yet her presence, her influence, freed from the confines of the boat and the mist, not only stood more remote but reared more alarming. Their adventure, which had seemed limitless, now poignantly ended.

"I hope," he began, "I hope —" He longed vaguely to offer help, but against what? And why did she still look down, as though afraid or angry?

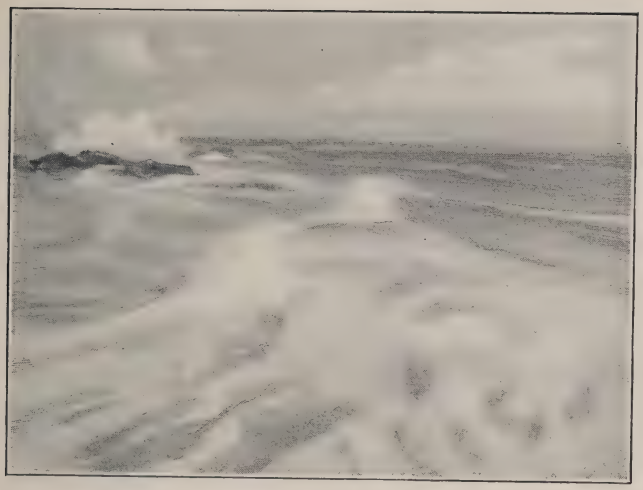
"What ye doin' down there?" growled a thick, slurring voice. "Good-f'r-nothin', traipsin'—told ye —"

The bank and upper shore formed a layer of solid reality, below the brooding unreality of the fog. The little house, gray and raggedly patched, stood close at hand, against the white shafts of birches. In the open door stood Abram, swaying blindly.

"Come 'ere!" he grumbled. "Come 'ere to me! I'll learn ye—"

He brandished an uncertain fist, lurched a step forward, and stumbled. The rising bank hid his fall.

Without looking back, the girl went slowly up the beach.



## CHAPTER V

### THE HIGH WOODS

"Signs ain't no great, I never 'lowed," said Ella thoughtfully. Sweeping her knife in a neat semicircle, she pared the dough round the edge of a tin plate. The sweet, steamy breath of apple pies filled the kitchen, consorting genially with the soft, high sunshine reflected upward from snow-fields without. "No more ducks' breast-bon's for me! November, and see there!" She pointed at the frosty window-panes. "Open winter! What's a shut? And for cold, why, 'fore breakfast, the what's-name's 'way down below the other thing."

She knelt before the stove, cautiously placed

her newest product, and rose muttering, her freckled cheeks, powdered with flour, rouged with heat from the oven.

"Don't tell me!" she grumbled, as though taxing Miles with the weather's iniquity. "Yisterday, fall. To-morrow, winter. Onseasonable, and ondignified, like's if the powers was playin' us tricks. 'T ain't the wet kind that goes, but the dry that keeps aholt. Below what's-name, too. Beats Old Roper!"

Through the glistening stillness came a thin, mellow jingle.

"Sleigh-bells!" Ella nodded, with an air of angry wisdom. "Another year gone. Shoofly! No more'n last week, first mud to out on wheels; and here's them things a-calangalin' round again!"

Helpless against this revolution of the seasons, Miles laughed.

"Not my fault, Ella." Listening to the jog-trot cadence of the bells, he added, "They're coming here."

"Ain't neither — yes, they are too!" Ella bustled to the back window, and, twisting her apron into knots, stared eagerly up the smooth, white heave of the hill. "Who'll it be, s'pose? All is, he'll break out our ro'd for us! I'd ought to reco'nize any bells o' twenty mile round — do, too. Them's either Old-Hab, or Lazy-Hab, or Cal Martin the tinker."

Against the pale sky, with a slow and broken jangling of bells, appeared a sorrel horse. He shambled steeply down, knee-deep in drifts, yet straining to hold back a broad sled. The driver, swathed to the eyes, precariously embraced a sled stake, like a trained bear hugging his pole.

"Old-Hab's hoss," reported Ella.

"Ho there, Danamite!" sounded a smothered growl. The bells cut their music short; and a moment later Old-Hab himself battered the door, and, entering, unwound a woolen muffler white-furred with frozen breath. His bony cheeks, at last uncovered, shone glazed and flaming.

"By the hokey," he grumbled, breathing sharp and stamping his yellow "larrigans" on the oilcloth. "Smells good in here, Miss Dawson. Black as night, too. Takes this piercifyin' cold to aidge a man's stummick and file his teeth. Dretful holler, this weather!"

"Eatin'! What did I say?" With the ready grievance of a comedian, Ella turned to Miles. "Eatin', I says, is the first word Hab Belden speaks inside this house! There ye go."

The teamster, unmoved, began to shed jacket after jacket, — a grimy sheep-fleece, a worn reefer, a faded blanket coat belted with tarred rope. After each struggle he diminished in bulk, as though peeling layer by layer to the core; till at last, dashing his cap on the discarded pile, he emerged like Burleigh from the Lord Treasurer, and stood forth as a little, wiry, beardless man in a brown jersey. His narrow body, sharp, frost-red features, and Indian hair brushed fiercely back in coarse lines, gave him an eager, wind-swept air, as of a weather-cock facing the winter blast. In a gusty way he veered upon Ella.

"You can talk like Day o' Pentecost," he said, admiring. "But don't tell us ye can't beat the old house afire at cookin'! I says to 'em all, up Sweet Water way,

they can't use the same oven with Ella Dawson."

"Shoo-fly," retorted the cook contemptuously. None the less, she rummaged for dishes, and slowly arranged them on the table. The flatterer was soon plying an expert knife.

"Well, Mr. Mile," he continued, "I've come o' business to your gran'father. Consarns you, but no hurry. Cares can wait: Old Appetite, not so.—Now, why don't a handy girl like that ever git merried?"

"Much!" cried Ella angrily. She turned her back, and stared out at window, muttering, "Waste time ketchin' some glutteron to cook for?" No one but a Bissant might have known what memory her scorn disguised, or in what gale Ben Constantine went overboard, thirty years ago.

A feeble step came down the passage. The inner door opened.

"Mornin', Mr. Bissant." Their visitor finished his coffee at a gulp and sprang up, nodding and ducking. "Health fust rate, I hope, sir?"

"Fair, thank you," replied the Admiral's brother. "And yours, Mr. Belden?" His white head inclined gravely. Perhaps it was the upward-slanting glow in the sunny kitchen, perhaps some subtler effect of the strange, untimely cold; but of late, and now especially, he seemed to Miles far more old and frail. Age had stolen upon him in his chamber, as winter had surprised the yellow autumn fields.

"Mine's tol'able, thank ye," replied the teamster. "Now fust crack, sir, here's the whole point, and no offense. I'm bound up

to High Woods, after cord-wood; also to mark handy spots, p'r'aps, for gittin' out knees. Sleddin''s fine: might be Feb'uary. Now to Kilmarnock is neither youngsters ner able bodies. No one free to go but my son, Lazy-Hab, who ain't no great, all knows, beside he's a hard-o'-hearin' man. I got kind o' desprit. 'What, miss all that splendid goin'?' thinks I. 'Won't neither. There's young Mr. Mile, the bigness of a man a'ready.' Now all I ask is, will he ride along o' me, week or ten days, and do a man's work for a man's wages?"

"I don't know," replied old Mr. Bissant in slow surprise. "It's pretty cold, Habakkuk. The mercury showed —"

"My feelin's is better 'n any old jibometer!" cried the other recklessly. "'Scuse

my common way, sir, but it 'll do the young man good."

"True for once!" cried Ella, with sudden animation. "Let him go! If anybody ever needed a change! He's been mopin' and sykin' about this house like a sweetheart in a picture book!"

Miles felt his grandfather's eyes fasten on him so odd a scrutiny that he gladly heard the interruption of Tony's laugh. "Yes, let him go skylark," called the sailor, lounging in from the passage. "The lad's been cooped up till he's stale. I'll keep all shipshape for him here. This last fortnight he's hardly spoken to us — sour even on his old mate!"

"You're right, Florio. You're always right." The old man nodded. Seldom had his wrinkled face appeared so tolerant, his

eyes and voice so regretful and kindly. "I hate to lose you out of sight, boy, but — perhaps —"

"Slip your cable!" laughed Tony.

So Miles went with Habakkuk Belden to the High Woods.

"Thought he'd knock under," chuckled the teamster, as they slid jingling through the powdery snow. "Here, Mile, drive Danamite whilst I git a pipeful o' Mundungo. Yes, sir, a turr'ble persuadin' tongue I got, if a man can brag o' gifts. The pen of a ready writer! But the Old Sir looks peeked, Mile. Standin' so in the door, I saw a breath o' feebleness go out again' him. Well, stren'th don't hitch up with years. G' long there, Danger!"

The road ran high and lonely over the ridges. Their eyes, dazzled with leagues of

white glare, blurred with tears in the sweep of a freezing wind, gained power slowly to descry the milder gleam of the channel far beneath, and beyond this, the billowing of the Maine hills, softened by distance and the smoothing magic of the snow. Sometimes, dipping into a smothered hollow among firs, they suffered again a momentary blindness, in the obscurity of dark green and shadowed white; and again, yet once more dazed with wide brilliancy, climbed higher and farther from the river, up an immense and softly convex curve, toward the fugitive sky-line. Black evergreen tops, the distant relics of some grove, dotted the hill like ermine; or singly, and closer to hand, like feathered arrows that a giant might have shot straight downward. Rarely these, however; so free was the north wind, so shelter-

less and dry the snow, that by turns the sled groaned over frozen mud, and stuck fast in smoking drifts.

As the two men pushed and tugged to aid the horse, or slapped their aching hands, or stamped and kicked the sled, they exchanged few words. The slow jangling of the bells traveled in the void, a stray mote of cheerful sound.

To Miles, looking back down many a long slope, they chimed with vague but happy thoughts. He surveyed, in shining perspective from this eminence, not only his native valley, but the last fortnight of his life there. Ella was wrong, he had not moped; Tony was wrong, he had hardly considered their estrangement; here was the real truth: before that adventure in the fog, he had passed his days in a brown study, and after it, had

been whirled into the glowing rout of life. A hundred dim things which had passed him by he now saw, heard, felt, and thrillingly understood.

Two regrets lingered: he had not seen again either the man or the girl of Alward's Cove; and from them he traveled farther at every shake of the bells. Yet all that was but temporary; and meanwhile, to his strange, new vision of the world, the simplest detail in this simple journey was a bit of exultation.

The woods at last received them into vast and crowded silence. The sorrel horse, with steaming haunches, plodded heavily through a dark lane of virgin whiteness, between puffy, undulating banks of buried underwood. Beyond or through these, in broken glimpses of depth, white and black trunks so lurked and interchanged in reciprocating

movement as to create an illusion of presences — many, yet one — who dodged and spied and followed. There seemed no other life in all this stillness. Yet now and then, in sunny clearings, a line of tiny hollows, filled with shadowy blue, marked some late woodland errand; the straight trot of a fox, scored alongside with shallow scoops of his brush; the neat cuneiform written by partridge claws; the bunched all-fours of a leaping rabbit, or the beaten stream where his whole tribe had flowed over log and knoll into some green cavern. When drifts halted the sled, and brought the bells to silence or single notes, an invisible brook chuckled from among willows, its runnels gossiping under ice and snow.

At dusk the two men reached a dark little shanty in second-growth beeches.

"W'oa there, Gyasticus!" cried Hab. "Here y' are. Stand by to unlo'd dunnage!"

That night they spent in watches, turn about, sleeping and tending fire; and before daylight were out and away to distant groves of birch and maple. A week of happy, vigorous days fled by. Sometimes the two chopped side by side; sometimes they separated for whole mornings, each alone in the snowy wilderness, but for the ringing shock of the other's axe in frosty wood, half a mile away. The novice felled his trees, first with reluctance at such treachery to old friends, but later with a workman's pride. In the beginning they crashed through their neighbors' tops in a violent cloud of snow, dazzling as an explosion of diamond dust; but now they dropped, groaning, with one clean swing into their foreseen places.

At noon Miles met Habakkuk in the lee of a tall granite boulder, blackened with smoke, and crowned with the red spikes of sumac. Here, over a leaping fire, they boiled snow for their coffee, and thawed their frozen food; and here they lounged for a half hour of vernal warmth and drowsiness. Snow, melted by noonday sun above and flame beneath, dropped round them from the branches, in white batons that broke and dispersed in mid-air. A thin arc of pale green grass bordered the melting semicircle where they sat, with steaming moccasins, while Old-Hab growled some slow account of "getting out knees," of swamping, stumpage, the excellence of beech for "water-log work," and all the personal traits of Nasty Ellum, Old Popple, and Master Oak.

Night found them tired in camp, sleeping or watching the fire. Once or twice only they sat together talking.

"Yes, sir, for my years, I stay clever," said Habakkuk, on one of these rare occasions. Smoking wisely, he pointed his weather-vane countenance toward the glow. "Can't leave Old Mundungo alon', but never teched Rum. Result is, spry and tough as linkum-vity. Old-Hab they call me; but that's jest to tell apart from Lazy-Hab. Now me, always fond o' work; him, always talkin' o' luck and lookin' for easy ways. Never could break that boy to harness. A hard-o'-hearin' man, he is; but eyes like a bee. Always connivin' round and spyin' after truck. Spoilt a turnip-field, one time, diggin' for gold."

The teamster chuckled, meditating.

"Cap'n Kidd's pirate money, once, he 'lowed 't was hid somewheres along ar shore. To see him, those days, you'd thought the price o' clams had ris'. And shortly afterwords, havin' eyesight like a bee, the young fool found some kind o' mound up into a patch o' woods. Took spade, pick, and lantrun, and sneaked up there one night. Old Postmaster Quinn see his light, and bein' always of a busy-brain, followed him after. Found Lazy-Hab over a dug hole, pryin' open a chist full o' stuff.

"'What ye doin'?' shouts Quinn. 'Come away from that!'

"Lazy-Hab, bein' a hard-o'-hearin' man, kep' right on. So Quinn claps mouth to ear, and bellers 'Small-pock!'

"Lazy-Hab give a jump like Sam Patch, and run, and never stopped for spade or

lantrun. 'T was that Portugee sailor's kit, died o' the small-pock up to Barry's."

Again the wood-chopper laughed, quietly.

"All one same," he continued, growing serious, "that ain't sayin' the Old Sir did n't bury no pirate-money round these parts." He rose suddenly, nodding with an air of mystery. "Reminds me. Come along till I show ye."

Bundling himself warmly, and seizing the lantern, he led Miles outdoors, round the hut, through the whispering withered leaves of the stunted beeches, and up a steep rising ground. Wading thigh-deep, or scrambling over dry granite, they gained the rocky summit of a little hill.

"I see it a fortni't ago," said Old-Hab. "Up here alon'. P'r'aps 't won't show to-night." He pointed across the vast dark-

ness of the valley. "Down there's the river, and my finger's 'bout on that bit o' island opposite your place. Now from tide-water, she looks all solid fars and spruce, don't she? But up here, daytimes, they show jest a ring-round, like, and a bald spot in the middle. Now, one night — "

He bosomed the lantern under his sheepskin coat. In starlight, they faced a bitter wind, hearing only the whisper of the beeches and the distant bark of a fox.

"Watch! Nothin', is they? Well, p'r'aps —Hold on! See there!"

Far off and far below, a point of light gleamed, winked, shone steady for some minutes, and was gone.

"Jest like other time," said Hab. "Now what d' ye make o' that?"

Miles, wondering, could find no explanation.

"Me neither," muttered his companion, as they descended to the hut. "Some one diggin' for the Old Sir's money? I give it up. Ain't pic-nic weather, any rate, jibometer below. Not tellin' fo'ks, but some loafin' weather I may take a look there myself — invest things, kind of."

Without further incident their ten days drew to a close. Though they climbed the hill a second time, no light appeared on the island. Their speculation flagged, and soon Miles was to forget it, along with other trifles.

They were returning from a day's work below the hut, and had crossed a long bog or heath, where the pent-up water of some brook shone toward the sunset, a broad, pale mirror of green ice. On the upper side of this they had gained the road, which ran

roundabout with the low, skirting alders, black against the west, — a belt of night, between the last daylight sinking vertically in the sky and the last daylight horizontally retreating along the ice.

"Somebody comin'," said Old-Hab suddenly. Both men paused and listened.

They heard no bells, but in the extreme silence of twilight caught a faint jingle of trace-chains, and the frosty creak of runners, following Hab's own runners in the ruts of a week ago. Some one drew slowly nearer, invisible in the black band of night, but moving as an obscure, watery reflection along the sallow ice, darkening the thin, inverted fringe of alders. The picture of that still approach, long afterward, became for Miles the symbol and essence of all misgiving.

A white horse appeared, drawing a swaddled figure on a sled.

"Hallo!" called the voice of Tony.

He pulled up, and fixed them with a strange look, his eyebrows sharply contracted in the dusk.

"Is that you?" His tone, though matter of fact, was subdued and changed. "Miles, old chap, I — They sent me after you."

"Has — has anything happened, Tony?"

The sailor nodded soberly.

"Your grandfather wants to see you. You'd better come along." He hesitated, then fell back upon that homely phrase which trouble has consecrated. "He — he's a very sick man, Miles. I'll take you."

It seemed to Miles that all his life he had foreseen and known this moment in the dark woods.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE COUNCIL

The house, as they plunged down the last hill at midnight, showed orange squares above and below, — the windows in both stories, lighted as for some rare festivity. The sight was unfamiliar and daunting. So, when the door opened, was the strange new dignity with which Ella admitted him and answered his unspoken question.

"Asleep; restin' quiet. Cap'n What's-name here'll take Quinn's hoss home. Come get your supper, and then straight to bed."

He obeyed, as in a dream. In whispers, by the yellow lamplight, she forced him to eat and drink; then led the way upstairs.

As they tiptoed past, the door of the sick-room stood ajar. Miles peeped in. A shawl curtained the bed from lamp and firelight, but even in deep shadow the sleeper's face wore a sinister mask of alteration.

"To bed now," whispered the servant. "I'm settin' up, Miles." She touched his shoulder gently. "Come. To-morrow 'll do."

He lay down, fully dressed, and ready for misfortune. Dozing through the dark hours, he roused, from time to time, at an imaginary summons. Weariness conquered, however, and when he woke Ella stood watching, from beside a window flooded with sunshine.

"He wants to see ye, after breakfast," she said quietly. "Doctor 's come and gone again. I would n't wake ye, poor dear. No noos. No change, either way."

Again, using a forgotten title of childhood, she compelled him to sit at table: "You must keep up, little Cap'n. Can't have two sick men." That new, quiet authority of hers remained a strange comfort, even as he mounted the stairs.

His grandfather lay sunken among pillows, his eyes closed, his features pale, gaunt, profoundly calm. Of suffering, of life itself, no more trace appeared than in a carven effigy of patience. Then quite suddenly his eyes opened, roved about the room in feeble search, and, resting on Miles, lighted dully.

"Ah, the boy! Come sit by me." He whispered hoarsely, and with slow effort. "I've got my orders, have n't I? Not long, my boy, not so very long now."

To hear their dread thus put roundly into

words, aloud, from the man's own lips, seemed at first a tragic impropriety.

"Oh, grandfather, no!" Miles faltered, without conviction.

"Yes." The old man smiled strangely, placidly. "I knew it. Only a bad cold to start with. I could shake that off —" He stirred impatiently, as if to prove his words, then sank back in resignation. "Heart too weak. I overheard the doctor."

Somehow, for the first time in his life, Miles felt that his grandfather's frown was rather habitual than unkindly.

"Well, it's no great matter, Miles." The voice continued, halting and broken, sometimes clear, sometimes a whisper. "So long as you came time enough — all right. Now I want to make my confession. Don't you be too hard on me."

Crabbed age and youth had lived together, and lived happily, under fixed conditions of authority and deference; and now the old man's words, or rather something of anxiety in his look, appeared to reverse all their common habits, to set their life-long attitude topsy-turvy. A judge, severe and just, present above the young man's daily acts, swaying his blindest motives, had imperceptibly become an unknown strength and necessity. To have this strength suddenly fail, this judgment submit to his own, gave Miles a forlorn sense of uncertainty, of loneliness. Independence, that stern, hard-won privilege, was now granted him without warning, thrust violently into his heart. And the same hand which planted this new gift plucked up thoughts and feelings rooted in his childhood.

"It's this sailor, Florio," said the old man. "He's been very heavy on my conscience. He lied to me, but I could use it, and so I lied in turn — to you — perhaps the whole neighborhood — At my age — It's all disgraceful!"

He paused, and, resting, seemed to cast about for words.

"I've been very hard with you. Yes — heavy load, tight rein. I was — was afraid you might slip away. And I want you to start well — to go far. You must be something better than a book-worm, like me — a broken-down surveyor of land. Eh? Yes, better than your father Godfrey, or Christopher; yes, or my brother George, the Admiral himself. Perhaps. Look to it."

A fit of coughing interrupted him.

"No, sit there. I must talk, anyway,"

he continued weakly. "Stand by. Paupers and poorhouses—I've always talked those at you, have n't I? Why, boy? Because I was a miser. We kept lighthouse — for money. That does n't matter; but the worst is —" A faint flush had stolen into his hollow cheeks. "The worst is, I even kept this half-breed fellow — God knows who he may be; he's no friend of Christopher's — I saw that in the first week, but I took his money. Hard — but I hated — oh yes, disgusting — a shame!"

With a stifled, inarticulate sound, the speaker paused, and closed his eyes for a time, then bent them on Miles in a timid appeal.

"Miser, that's the word. But — I was saving everything, good and bad — saving for the fund, for your start. I taught you as

far as I could. Now promise me you'll go farther. Out — away from here — the world — study — work. There's enough for a year, perhaps two. All yours — black and white — my box. You must use it well — came hard. Say you're not ashamed of me!"

The distance between age and youth, the mist of self, the vague screen dividing their daily lives, were annihilated. In sudden wisdom and contrition, Miles bent his head beside this man whom he had never known before.

"Ashamed?" he cried, dimly measuring the sacrifice. "Ashamed? Oh, grandfather!"

"Come, come, then!" Something of the testy, hard old voice returned for the instant. "Come, then, it's all right. What did the old preacher say, that they burned? 'It's given to no man to choose the time or

manner of his death.' Not a case of Nunc Dimittis, I'm not allowed to see it through. What of that? At least — Call the thing unfinished — a man cut down in hot blood — does n't feel it — Only, you must start. Your half begins. I want you — take it all. I never could use fine words! — Go find what you're good for."

Miles nodded, but could not speak. Shame and wonder contended in him, at thought of his own blindness all these years: he had considered his grandfather as a grim, silent man, preoccupied with gloomy fear of the future. Revelation had come: the spent runner now resolutely passed on the torch, and Miles trembled at his unworthiness to receive it from such hands.

"One thing more," continued the old man, stirring uneasily. "What was this Ella

said, t'other day, about sweethearts, or some nonsense? Did she mean — Is there—"

"I — I don't know," stammered Miles. The challenge had struck him hot and cold. The more sincerely he faced it, the more this question deepened into a yawning pit of subtleties. "Honestly — I don't know."

"Don't know?" His grandfather eyed him almost angrily. "What sort of answer is that? See here, I can't have— At your age — You must promise me — "

A violent cough seized him, and left him shaken and breathless. For a long time he rested, as if asleep. And when at last he spoke again, a smile of serene humor, of high forbearance and security, lighted the sunken eyes.

"You promise nothing, boy. If I had promised my father — I'm an old fool.

We've agreed to the main thing, already. It's all right. You're a man. Give me the — that nasty dose, there."

He sank back, as though he had reserved all his forces for their interview, and now lay exhausted. The ticking of a clock, the flutter of the fire, accompanied that labored breathing through slow and sorrowful hours. The watcher must have dozed; for of a sudden, the shadows of the hackmatack boughs quivered easterly along the floor. The afternoon was already closing. Ella sat, with folded hands, by the hearth.

Time again dragged by, till the sleeper moved. Without seeming to wake, he whispered: —

"I can't remember. Bring me the book."

A Bible lay on the table; but as though he heard Miles lift it, he shook his head.

"I've read that. I know it. The other — below — the black book."

Ella nodded, stole from the room, and returned with the old man's volume of the poets.

"How does it go? Read to me, Miles. 'Even so is time' — You know it."

Miles found the page, and with an unsteady voice obeyed.

> "'Even such is time, that takes in trust
> Our youth, our joys, our all we have,
> And pays us but with earth and dust;
> Who, in the dark and silent grave,
> When we have wandered all our ways,
> Shuts up the story of our days.
> But — '"

The old man stopped him, with a sign of content, and took up the lines, whispering: —

> " ' But from this earth, this grave, this dust,
> My God shall raise me up, I trust! ' "

He lay very still; but when, after a time, Ella would have offered him something in a glass, he put her hand feebly aside. Miles could not hear their words, except, "If every one was faithful as you—" and the woman's reply, "I'll never leave him till he sends me away." She rose, and, crossing to the window, where a row of geraniums glowed in the sunset, stood picking blindly at the dead leaves.

He continued to speak, but neither audibly nor with the living. From time to time they caught the name of George, Godfrey, or Christopher. His eyes remained closed; but his face turned slightly, now and then, with the air of one who clearly saw and heard the persons in a ghostly conference. As day drooped into night, the seen fused with the unseen. And it was in a mystical

twilight that he turned toward Miles, at last, with a look of grave relief, which told that the council had reached some fortunate conclusion. The lips barely moved, and indeed the eyes made their effort needless.

"I'm satisfied, my boy."

The only praise he had ever given, it was beyond all value.

The woman lighted a lamp behind the shawl; then stood beside Miles, waiting. Nothing moved in the room, except twin shadows of the andirons fluttering on the wall, alert and capricious as a pair of fencers. In the passage Tony the sailor had paused silently, like a man drawn by strange impulse to the edge of a forbidden circle.

Something approached, arrived, and culminated. The counterpane stirred. It was as though a broad and soothing wave had

lifted the prostrate figure slightly, and passed, bearing away the spirit in one gentle, mighty undulation.

The servant was the first to speak.

"He was a good man," she whispered. 'It's over now. He was a good man."

Within two days Richard Bissant lay beside his brother, the Admiral, close beneath a yellow birch that rose in the highest field, a living monument, a landmark to ships below in the river. He had taught Miles to believe that the natural body is raised a spiritual body, and that this corruptible must put on incorruption. And though the grave, cut in frozen earth, and ringed about with shapeless banks of snow, seemed in those bleak surroundings to gain more than a brief victory, yet the survivor, feeling his

sorrow as a man, could still dispute it like a man.

One thing, in this time of perplexity, appeared beyond mistake; and that was Tony's unwonted and unflagging kindness. Silent in his moccasins, like a sea-gaited Indian, he had come and gone about the house, bringing armfuls of firewood, helping Ella, tending the tower lamps. It was he who ran all errands to Kilmarnock, and shoveled the broad path from their door to the birch tree on the hill. Not only his activity, but his silence and retirement, had shown a right spirit, touched honestly. Miles, recalling his former thoughts, saw them as unjust. After all, the sailor, like the man who was now become a memory, had only kept his own counsel. "And I blamed him for that!" thought Miles, with remorse.

And yet Tony's presence was none the less disquieting. It had vexed and humbled, however needlessly, the closing days of a most honorable life; and Miles, though wishing to keep the man's friendship, rebelled at thought of using him for profit. Right or wrong, it was very strongly in his mind that Tony must either leave or come to an explanation; for since that conference in the sick-room, the sailor's standing, the whole arrangement, became more and more false and intolerable.

Other questions cropped up in their altered household, — questions of the past and the future, jostling in a mind still dazed. And it was these which, two nights after the burial on the hill, kept the young man restless. He lay revolving vague plans, resolutions, regrets, till at last, foregoing all hope of sleep,

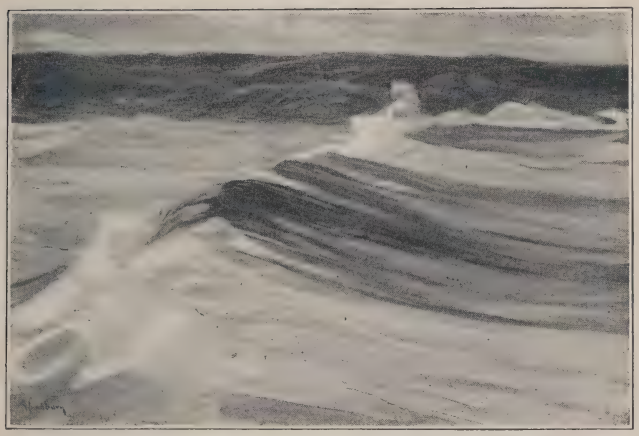
he rose, dressed in the dark, and stole downstairs to the little front room which had been his grandfather's "library." A puddle of ruby coals still glowed in the fireplace; but before sitting down by these, he turned toward the gray square of the windows, and stood looking out through a wide, cosmic starlight, faint and deceptive, but dimly intensified by frosty air and the whiteness of snow. Without speech or language, the heart of the darkness strengthened the heart of youth, as above the silent valley night unto night showed knowledge.

Stillness without grew almost palpable, through stillness within. The house lay drowned in sleep. But suddenly Miles heard a thin, brushing sound upon the landing above, the squeak of a board, and the dry rasp of a hand sliding down the banister-rail.

Some one descended with extreme caution, and then, below the row of pegs in the dark corridor, struggled into a jacket, with subdued fluttering of heavy cloth. The front door slowly creaked, and, letting chill air flood the room, as slowly creaked again.

It lacked two hours before time for inspection; and besides, whoever went to the towers would carry a lantern. Miles watched. A dark, thick-set blur moved out under the starlight and disappeared between the two hackmatack pillars. Tony the sailor was up and about his affairs.

Angry and determined, Miles crept along the passage, drew on his reefer as silently as the other had done, and slipped outdoors into the freezing darkness.



## CHAPTER VII

### HABAKKUK'S LIGHT

STARS, frost, and glimmer of snow blended into a bluish, dim suffusion, a hyperborean obscurity that was neither light nor darkness. The figure ahead showed as a blotch of denser twilight, dissolving, rather than moving, down the slope. Miles prowled after, straining his eyes to detect in what quarter of the black undergrowth it was absorbed and blotted.

No light, no sound, could either guide or betray him. His impulse had been to stride along, to overtake and question the sailor; but so, reflection told him, he might destroy his only chance to learn the truth. He waded on-

ward, accordingly, with great care; and slipping through fir branches, gained free footing in the beaten path. No wind stirred; and though faint aerial changes drew widely over the valley, not a bristle whispered among all the drooping, padded layers of black and white. With the old expectancy he came to the buried quarter-deck. No one appeared.

He crossed, and was passing into the evergreen gap beyond, when he ran solidly against some person emerging. With an angry start he grappled the stranger by both arms. For an instant they wrestled silently. Wrapped in a long rough ulster or cloak, his opponent not only struggled at a disadvantage, but exerted neither weight nor force. Miles felt a lithe body strain furiously to escape, and then, after a single spasm of resistance, unexpectedly surrender. At the

same moment, as they lurched back against the yielding support of young boughs, in a downfall of clotted snow, he felt his cheek swept at once sharply by fir needles and softly by disordered hair. In shifting holds, his bare hand closed tight round a bare wrist, surprisingly frail and warm.

"Oh, you're hurting me!" complained the captive in a fierce whisper. "Let go!"

Whether at the voice, the contact, or the recognition, a quick thrill ran through his fore-arm, like the instant passage of a mysterious current.

"It's you!" Both spoke at once, with the same manner, the same thought.

Looking for Tony, he had found his companion of the fog. This surpassing wonder overwhelmed him. Yet in that flaming instant, in the very rout of reason, Miles —

where a wise man or a fool might have inferred obviously and ignobly — saw the facts with the ease of inspiration.

"We're out on the same errand," he whispered. "You're looking for your father?"

"How did — I can't tell you!" she panted. "Let me go! Please, let go!"

"Oh, I forgot." He released her, suddenly confused and awkward. "I did n't mean — I — I'm sorry."

She started as if to pass, then stopped.

"What did you want him for?" she asked, with a strange mingling of timidity and reproach. "Why are *you* after him?"

"I'm not," said Miles. "It's your friend Florio —"

"My friend!" she whispered scornfully. "Then they *are* together!"

Through his excitement Miles had become aware that the sound of oars drew toward them down river, close to shore. The rowing stopped, just below; thin ice crackled, under the feet of some one tramping down toward the water; and the surly voice of Abram called from the stream, —

"That you, cap'n?"

From the shore Tony answered impatiently:

"Rather — with both feet in the mud. Stir your stumps, don't keep me freezing here!"

"Come's fast as I could," growled the other. "Need n't think you — put on airs!"

By tacit alliance, Miles and the girl found themselves leaning on the platform rail, peering together into the darkness. All below was invisible, but they heard the boat come grating to land, the mutter of the voices, and

the hollow, jerky beat of oars departing quickly, straight out from shore.

"Come on," whispered Miles. "Come along. Let's follow and see!"

The whim was contagious and inspiring. Together they scrambled down the snow-bank, joining hands for the steep slide. At the bottom Tony's boat loomed gray before them, buried like a knoll. The tarpaulin, loaded with snow, clung heavy and obstinate; but Miles ripped it off at last, and slid the boat gently from the chocks.

"Dragging it will sound like the mischief," he said. "Could you manage the bow?"

Luckily the boat was light, and as they staggered down the beach, winding among the black open patches and avoiding the ice, he felt, with a singular pride, that the girl held up her end gamely.

He had allowed the two men a long start, and still listened, till their oars sounded feebly across the water.

"Ready," he said at last.

She brushed past him into the stern. He shoved off, muffled the rowlocks in his woolen scarf and a boat-mop of frozen jute, and rowed slowly out, with only a faint creaking, and the steady trickle from the blades. Astern, as the shore retreated, the twin lights drew imperceptibly toward each other. Their glow left the water in darkness, and, dwindling, became fixed, lustrous points, as of two erring planets sunken low, on the wrong side of the horizon. Out here the river lay black under the starlight, which, no longer reflected by the snow, seemed to have raised and withdrawn aloft. Far ahead the oars were beating regular as a pulse, — a dull

throbbing that alone disturbed the night, except when thin peals of untimely cock-crow sounded, faint as muted horns, from indoors, across wide distances.

"Don't they seem strange?" said the girl, half to herself. "Like something — like a ghost story."

"Yes — or the legend," answered Miles. "And it *is* drawing on to Christmas time."

A short silence followed, before she asked:

"What legend?"

"Oh — why, you know it." He slowly recalled the lines, prompted by the pale mystery of stars overhead, the swerving profundity of the tide beneath, but more than all by the whispering, muffled figure on the thwart, obscure as a shape of sorcery.

"'Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
This bird of dawning singeth all night long.
And then —' "

The dripping of the oars marked the pauses, crisply and rhythmically.

"'And then, they say, no spirit can walk abroad;
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallowed and so gracious is the time."

He rowed on steadily.

"Oh, I remember where," she said, after a time. "They read that to us in school one winter. It's very beautiful. But I can't remember things like you. I wish — " She laughed somewhat bitterly. "We don't have books in our house — "

Though strange, their situation seemed profoundly simple, — a sudden, unforeseen, yet natural welding of present to past ad-

venture. They were afloat together, in the same wide concealment, almost as though the same obscurity, without interval, had but changed from white to black. So welcome was this conjoining magic that, for the moment, they could forget its cause.

Suddenly, however, the sound which they followed came to an end.

"They heard us," whispered the girl.

Miles, with a like thought, stopped rowing. Still, their voices had been quiet as their oars. Surely the two men had not — yet why should they drift in mid-stream? He pondered, listening; and then first came the memory of Habakkuk's light, seen from the high woods.

"The island. They're landing." Even as he whispered they heard, well off their port

bow, the crash of splintering beach ice. "The lower end."

He swung the boat's nose up river, and, yielding to the flood-tide, made for the head of the island. Gradually the loom of shore spread round and above them, deepening the night. As if a shadow had solidified, the unseen beach grated softly beneath their bow.

"Sand!" said Miles. "A piece of luck."

With one hand on his shoulder, she vaulted lightly ashore. They lifted the boat beyond reach of tide, climbed a shelving slant that rose to the foot of the main ledge, and groped along an impending granite wall, which the river had deeply gnawed and under-cut, as cattle ravage a haystack. A cleft, however, at last gave access; and grasping each other timorously, struggling together, they gained

the upper level. Here the north wind had swept the beak of the island clear; for scrubby bushes — lambkill, perhaps, or sweet-fern, or blueberry — parted rustling underfoot, with the frailest odor of dried herbs. Then evergreens compassed all about, breast-high, in snow and darkness.

They now waded so heavily in drifts, through a grove so deeply smothered, that their venture began to appear both difficult and harebrained. Its impulse was rapidly cooling, when a sudden light swung through the firs ahead, and turned the thicket into a reel of ponderous shadows, dizzily whirling upward. This motion ceased. The snow-fronds gleamed in swollen, billowy outlines.

Among these the two companions peered. They had struck through the annular grove

of the island, and were looking into the open centre. A white drift, crested like a wave, shone behind a lantern set upon bare ground. Tugging sounds and a click of metal rose close at hand, behind a screen of boughs. A man grunted angrily.

"There, by Godfrey! Told ye so! I bust the lock!"

"What odds?" replied the cheerful voice of Tony. "Don't need it. Rip it off!"

"Do your own rippin'! My fingers ain't nobody's monkey-wrench."

"No, they'd rather pick pockets. Stand clear, then." Something snapped. "There, my skulker! Almost took muscle, did n't it?"

"Don't you call me no names!" began Abram loudly.

"Shut your head!" cried the sailor imperiously. "By George, you make a man sick

with all your nasty blowing. Fill your sack, and shut up!"

Silence followed, broken by light thuds in quick succession. A shadow heaved athwart the glow, in a thin white cloud of steaming breath. It was Tony, with some shapeless burden in his arms.

"Come along," he said.

A second shadow rose, and stooped toward the lantern, grumbling.

"I don't tromp down them rocks no more 'thout a light."

"Let it stay!" roared Tony. "How many times must I tell you? We can't go showing lights on that beach. Drop it! You can see to cross the clearing, and that's enough. Next time, by thunder, you'll want me to carry you!"

They moved off, growling, round the

twisted spur of the snow-bank. The night swallowed them.

Miles gave ample time, before venturing further; then floundered on through gleaming undergrowth. The verge, however, rose impassable. A gigantic drift flung one smooth, graceful whirl round the little hollow, or bowl, in which the lantern shone. To break through would leave a tumbling track of ruin. The ring stood therefore as good as enchanted: he could only lean forward and look.

Close below lay scattered boughs of spruce or fir; and among these, half uncovered, a square chest yawned enormous, with lid thrown back. Full or empty, it showed nothing inside but darkness.

The return of angry voices sent him dodging back among the trees. In the interval

the quarrel had flamed higher, for at the gap in the snow Tony wheeled with a savage flourish.

"Bother?" he scoffed. "You're the only bother I see!"

They swung nearer, and even by the smoky lantern, their faces shone red and threatening.

"And damned if I'll have it, either!" added Florio.

"Oh, no, 'tain't no bother," sneered his follower. "Not a mite! Reg'lar summer weather, ain't it, to be rowin' round in? No bother to git froze, or break your laigs again' rocks in the dark, or handle all that pesky stuff twice over! Usin' this island was a fool idee, from the start. No bother! When ye could kerry it all to oncet, single lo'ds, slap over to the furder shore!"

"Slap over!" mocked the sailor. "You

know, and none better, it's not every night Graves can take it off our hands. Meantime, what? Stow it in our pockets? or use what sense God gives geese!"

"Keep it on our own side," grunted Abram, "till Graves gits ready."

"You're a wonder!" The sailor dashed his empty sack on the ground passionately. "A fair wonder! I was in luck when I got you! Our own side! Where? Under the bed or up the chimney? Between that girl at your house and young Bissant at mine, how long would it stay hid? What's that? Outdoors? Good Lord! did it ever cross your mind that snow leaves tracks? Look behind you, and see the path we've beaten! But no one comes out here; and that's why, idiot!"

"Old man Bissant would 'a' took it in," retorted the mutineer. "Jest give him some

money, let him into cahoots, and he'd 'a' kep' still."

The two men faced each other closely, scowling above the light. Raging and voluble, Tony had spoken with more and more odd turns of voice and gesture, as though anger stirred his blood to a southern heat. Now he stepped forward quickly, and, half crouching, shook his raised fingers at arm's length, with all the intensity of a Latin.

"*Via, via!*" he cried. "You speak so of the dead! You — you scut! Never in a thousand years you would understand such a man! Say so again, and I knock off your head!"

The Yankee recoiled, but spat out intolerable filth.

"Ye don't bully me!" he snarled. "You big-bugs is no better'n the rest of us — him

nor you! All knows he was a skinflint, an old —"

Both figures suddenly reeled past the lantern, a tangled silhouette, which broke apart at the hard, quick slap of an open palm. Abram fell staggering, but sprang back as on the rebound. Something flashed in his hand. The two shapes joined again, struggling, with grunts and curses. In the same instant Miles felt himself shoved aside, and recovered barely in time to seize his companion's cloak and thrust her back. She would have rushed in straightway. He plunged forward himself, but as quickly halted.

The smaller of the combatants had shot clear of the ground, and landed with a hollow shock against the chest.

"Knives, would you?" panted the sailor. "You came to the right shop!"

He stooped, placed his foot on the blade, which he snapped in one powerful wrench; then rising, tossed the haft away, and spoke as cool and scornful as any Saxon.

"Next time try steel, not a piece of tin." His breath streamed white before him, as he added, in a voice of meditation, "I don't see yet what stopped me driving it into you. You've that girl to look out for. Huh! Poor thing! But to tell the truth, I never thought of that. Just luck, I suppose. Thank your stars, it's only your nose that's bleeding."

The fallen man, concealed below the bank, whimpered and snuffled.

"Come, come, brace up," advised his master. "You're well out of a scrape, Abe. I did n't see you were fighting drunk."

He bent again, this time as if to ransack the chest.

"I'll carry what's left, and do the rowing. You can sit still, and think it over."

A growl was the only answer.

"Don't bear malice," Tony protested lightly. "Can't afford that. Better stay by me. Where else would the money come from? That's the talk, up and doing! You're all right. Now, then, dowse your lantern, and carry on."

Darkness fell. The dry crunch of moccasins on frosty snow passed away into silence.

Miles, aching and benumbed, still waited to hear their oars, then ploughed through into the deserted clearing. Beside him stooped the girl, as they tossed aside the loose boughs from the cache. When at last their mittens slid over a glossy surface, he

struck a match. The tiny flare revealed a broad lid of polished yellow wood, the corners capped with brass, and a curious, foreign padlock hanging broken on the staple. He saw all this, and yet, even while he threw open the chest, saw more keenly the face above his shoulder, — the pure oval of her cheeks, her large eyes shining from the black shelter of a hood.

The first match went out. His second and last lighted the whole depth of the chest, and showed it empty. A faint, persuasive odor lingered within, exotic, alien to the winter air, new to their experience.

"What is it?" she whispered.

He shook his head, and dropped the burning splinter.

"But what are they doing?"

"I'm not sure," he answered slowly.

"Nothing that need worry you. Some secret. Come. They're going clear across the river. We can be home before them."

In starlight they heaped the boughs once more, waded through the belt of firs, and clambered down, hand in hand, toward the beach. All the way to their own shore, and all along the evergreen path from the quarter-deck to Alward's, a strange silence held them apart. With few words or none, they reached her door; only on the dark threshold she turned to speak, and then, as it seemed, resentfully.

"It is n't like you," she said; and before he could frame a question, "Why, not to tell me what you really think. That was what I liked about you."

He gave thought to his reply: —

"How can I tell you till I'm certain?

That would n't be fair — to any of us. It's nothing serious."

"If you believe that — " Her manner changed. "I suppose you're right. But when you're certain, will you ?"

"Of course," he promised. "The first minute I'm sure."

She made an impulsive movement. The darkness had thinned insensibly, yet enough to show her hand outstretched. He clasped it, both for good-by and for the compact.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE OTHER CAMP

THAT compact, as Miles stood waiting before the library fire, seemed reward enough, not only for their lesser troubles of last night, but for whatever might come, of greater. The words, the clasp of hands, the whole twilight scene, still occupied his thoughts so busily that when the latch clicked and Tony entered, he had formed no plan for the expected interview.

"Morning," called the sailor. Fresh and hearty as though he had slept all night, he wore somehow a thoughtful aspect; and his first movement was toward the window, where he paused to study the chessmen.

They stood as Richard Bissant had left them, but now, touched by winter sunshine, formed a little plot of brightness, thick-set, like white and scarlet hyacinths.

"He'd have won that time." Tony shook his head, musing. "Yes, if — A losing game we play, though, in this world, is n't it?" Again he shook his head, adding inconsequently, "One point, Miles: be happy while you're young."

His left side brushed a corner of the bookshelf. He winced, and nursed his arm, which moved clumsily.

"Lame there," he explained, without turning. "I stumbled last night, and hit her a clip."

"On our friend's knife?" suggested Miles.

Tony whipped about with a droll face of consternation.

"That fool been blabbing already?" he cried. "He can't be out of bed yet!"

Miles laughed.

"Come, Tony," he said quietly. "We must have a talk. We should have had, long before."

"You beat me!" Although Tony chuckled and flung himself into the armchair carelessly, the light in his large gray eyes twinkled hard and wary. "I'm sharp in a way, but you big, long, quiet chaps — Humph! What is it? Carry on!"

Miles came readily to the point.

"I was on the island last night," he began, "saw all your squabble there, and looked into your chest afterward. So I'll own up to eavesdropping, if you will to smuggling."

The sailor gave a short laugh, either scornful or temporizing.

"What?" he asked, as though rather amused than offended. "Smuggling what?"

"It does n't matter," answered Miles. "That's your affair. I don't know, and don't want to. If it's to go on —" He faltered, but spoke warmly, remembering the quarrel and Tony's outburst of generous anger. "One thing certain. If it's to go on — I like you better than ever, Tony, but — you can't keep this house for headquarters."

In high good humor, Tony rapped out an oath and hammered the arm of his chair.

"You're the sort," he laughed, his teeth flashing white, his eyes brimming with jovial admiration. "Might have known how you'd take it. By the Lord, there's no tattle-tale blood in you! You'll do, buster! Chuck me out, but stay friends. That the idea? Right you are! And devilish sorry I'll be to go."

By one of his sudden changes, his face, without darkening, fell entirely serious.

"Do you know, I never saw before —" He pointed his pipe-stem up at the sombre canvas above the mantel. "The old Commander there — he looks ready to reef, steer, crack a man's head, or fire a broadside. Good old days, those. Never saw before you looked so much alike. But you must take more on the mother's side."

"Maybe," replied Miles, wondering.

Tony studied them by turns, — the bold, severe face of Hardy's captain in the picture, the living face below.

"Head o' the family," he said at last. "Must be damned odd. All *my* life, now — If I had n't run loose — Strict ideas, strict ideas! Well, what's the odds? I was only going to say, Miles, you've grown up. This

last week — that's it: you've grown up." He rose, with an air of dejection. "You're right, too, old chap. I understand. I must clear out."

"We'll miss you, Tony," Miles began.

"Ye-es?" drawled the wanderer absently. Forcing a doubtful smile, he surveyed the room. "The time I've laid up here— Talk of eye-openers! What a rum thing it is, after all — a home!"

After this it was Miles who proposed delay, and Tony who would not listen.

"No," he repeated. "You struck it, first time. Quit the game or move out. That's all fair and square. If I did n't stand to win or lose — a good slice, too — why, I'd say quit. No! Finish! Come on, old boy, help lug my box downstairs!"

And with the box in the stern of his boat,

he shoved off from shore that very afternoon. He had shipped oars, and stretched forward his powerful arms for the first stroke, when suddenly he tossed back a startling farewell.

"I'll come see you, Miles," he laughed. "Better not return it, though. Abe might not understand; and the drunken blighter gives me trouble enough already."

"What!" called Miles, with a strange misgiving. "You mean — You're not going to Kilmarnock?"

"Kilmarnock!" retorted Florio. "And have that fat fool Quinn talk me inside out to the whole village? No fear — You need n't look so glum, though. Alward's won't be bad, for a poor exile. Why, there's a girl there that —" He grinned, wagged his head with a most rascally whistle, squared his great shoulders, and then, favoring the wounded

fore-arm, rowed out to swing against the current.

"Cheer up, Commander!" he shouted from the distance. "Don't forget, we stay friends!"

Gloomily enough, however, the young master of the shore returned alone among his hummocks, and climbed his glittering winter field. "I've made a mess of it," he thought miserably. They were now two in the house who had been four. Yet as numbers are not presences, the life within had abated, not merely by half, or more than half, but by an immeasurable void. Nor did the greater loss include the smaller; for in like disproportion Miles missed his friend the adventurer, at once, and afterward, more searchingly than he expected. Smuggling he could regard with all the tolerance of a borderer; so that as vacant

days followed lengthening toward spring, he came sometimes to feel that he had banished a live companion for a dead scruple. In the contrary mood — and this was no less dismal — he saw plainly what a dangerous spirit he had quartered on his best ally.

His promise to her, meantime, went by default; till on a snowbound morning of more than usual loneliness, he set aside Tony's wish, buckled on his snowshoes, rounded the headland to Alward's, and knocked at her door. Little good, however, came of this expedition. Abram, scowling, blocked his entrance. He caught a glimpse into a small room, bare, but surprisingly neat, from the unseen corner of which came a familiar voice, saying, with the comfortable inflection of a man thoroughly at home, "You know, Anna, a girl like you — "

The very voice that Tony could use for making friends; and now, heard only, unqualified by look or gesture, it somehow rang not so true. Instantly, however, it broke off.

"What's up?" called Tony, and heaved through the doorway.

"Oh, it's you!" he said coldly. "Hold on, I'll come with you."

They went back together along the shore, plodding side by side, but talking at random, with constraint; and when they parted at the upper tower, it was on vague though evident terms of division.

"I'll do all the neighboring." Tony spoke sulkily as a boy. "Thought I asked you not to come?"

After this ripple of incident, the winter days once more fell stagnant, or at the best, moved on sluggish and imperceptible. Rain came at

last, however, and thaws, and warm sea fogs devouring the snow more silently than either, and more swiftly. Then one by one, like spies of Nature stealing into the land, followed the slow and potent changes, yearly forgotten, yearly striking to the core of remembrance and delight. Hushing sounds of water rose from the gullies on still mornings; brown knolls, from day to day, heaved and widened; the ice moved out to sea, a white and broken flotilla, while the river cleared again to shining blue; snow forsook the hills, forsook the shore, and clung raggedly under the cedars in thick, worn plates of ice. Then, too, the earliest fly woke buzzing in the southern window, and at noon the house, with door swung wide, stood open to all the reviving sounds and nameless stirrings of the valley. Now and again, a stray cow gamboled ridiculously

down the field, her bell clanking, her shoulder bearing a leathern scar where, all winter long, she had chafed her stanchion. And over the graves, the birch grew blurred above the hill.

In all this time the outcast made no attempt at his "neighboring;" and Miles, without understanding, accepted their alienation. Even pride, however, could not keep him from being lonely, — more than ever lonely, in these mild days and nights of spring. He wandered by himself, framing and rejecting plans, no less discontented with the present than sorely puzzled by the future.

One afternoon, when he had taken these perplexities for another airing, he fell as it were into an April daydream by the river, leaning both elbows on the quarter-deck rail. Along the verge, and scattered among the rotten planks, peeped the russet tops of

young fiddle-head ferns, which to his brooding eyes seemed almost visibly to uncurl, as a kitten's paws uncurl, intense with drowsy and voluptuous life. Pale blades of grass were tenderly thrusting upward from edges of the warm rocks. And yet a damp scent of last year's leaves, that perished slowly in the hollows, sternly and wholesomely reminded him how the world cherishes to destroy, and destroys to cherish infinitely. Solemnity closed down upon him, while still a kind of beatific spell ran through his veins. For a long time, and for no cause, he recalled only the winter night when they had leaned together on the rail, watching.

By strong effort, at last, he denied this memory, repulsed this longing, and cleared the decks of his mind.

"I must go away." He fell back on the

promise doggedly. And the thought was like lead in his shoes, that once would have winged them. "As quick as summer comes, and Ella can tend lamps, I'm off. That's the plain course—"

Voices were coming, at the first sound of which he sprang upright. Through the evergreen wall pierced the quick utterance of Tony, angrily imploring.

"Treat me this way, like dirt?" he was urging. "And all because a fellow likes you, and tells you so? Honestly, I mean it, Anna. And what right have I given you to think—"

"Right!" The girl's voice also trembled, but as though with helpless fury. "What right have *you* to hunt and drive me like—like—Oh! And I was coming here just to be rid of you!"

"You can't, my dear," said the other, cajoling. "You can't, and that's a fact. Come now —"

A cry echoed among the evergreens as in an empty room.

"Go back, I hate the sight of you! Go back and let me alone! I wish I was a man, to kill you!"

Miles had sprung to the path among the firs. It widened before him into a little alley of green shadows, where the girl stood facing Tony, her hand raised to strike. As Miles broke through upon them, she wheeled with the same look, the same cry, as when he had rowed out to her in the fog. The sailor fell back. The malignant flush that darkened his face was new and ugly; and yet in his eyes a conflicting change, still more new and lighted with a saving honesty, continued to

blaze. If his anger were black as smoke, through it flickered some higher emotion.

"Hiding in the bushes?" he sneered. "You seem fond of that."

Miles found himself unexpectedly at high tension.

"It's my own shore!" he cried, choking. "You be off!"

He had run in close. They seemed on the point of clinching, when the girl darted between them, and with a swiftness that had the effect of strength, caught Miles by the arm, and flung Tony staggering backwards.

"For shame!" she cried. "Like a pair of wild savages! I'm ashamed of you both!" From under the high arched brows, her eyes sent out a dangerous light. She turned but the one shaft at Tony. "You go!"

He stood his ground, and retorted bitterly:

"Oh, I see. There *is* something between you."

"No!" She dropped the arm that she had clung to. And at the word or the movement, Miles understood, with a strange triumph, his late repulse from Alward's Cove. "No, there's nothing. But there's one thing, Captain Florio. This man's real, and I believe him clear through. And the way I believe you is just skin-deep, and the rest all hollow!"

Tony made a little plausible gesture of submission, as foreign as it was graceful.

"Short and sweet, that is," he answered. "Not true, all the same. I'm honest my own way, if I don't parade it like a God's miracle. I meant all I said, Anna; it's a pity you can't take it so."

He turned away, a jaunty penitent, swung

his wide shoulders edgewise into the gap, and disappeared among the firs. The whisking of the boughs died into silence; and next moment the girl's courage had fallen slack.

"Oh, what shall I do?" she whispered, as if alone. Her face she held averted; but Miles could see her head shaken like a daffodil on the stalk, and feel the hand tremble which had caught his arm again. "Where can I go? And it's in the same house with me— They're always there."

"Anna," he ventured; and as her hand dropped suddenly, "Have n't I as good a right to call you so? Come, we're old friends. Tell us."

She would not turn.

"It's — oh, it's nothing!"

"If it should be anything?" he persisted. "If you — won't you come tell me then?"

She looked up and away in a flash; but he had caught the lustre of brimming eyes.

"There's nobody else I could —'

"Oh!" he cried in a whirl. "To hear you say that —"

Footsteps crossed the quarter-deck, and scuffed in the path behind them.

"Hello! Ex-scuse me!" called a hearty though nasal voice. Like an aged Puck out of the bushes, Hab the teamster peered shiftily into their cover. The girl was away like a fawn.

The teamster's head remained as though he were imbedded in the evergreens. Wagging it, he broke into batrachian song: —

"A young man come a-seekin' her,
For to make her his dear,
An' he to his trade
Was a ship's carpenteer!"

"Did n't think it of ye, Mile," he added mournfully, then winked. "Ella stated you was down here. But she don't figger what was up, and bless ye, I'll never give it away." He looked behind him, called "Here he is, Mr. Furfey," and entered the lane.

A stranger followed him.

"Here, Mile," continued Habakkuk, with a flourish. "This feller's the gentleman I drove all the ways down here to interduce, name of Furfey."

It was a brisk, insignificant person who stepped forward, a smirking little man, half shabby and half prosperous, plainly an American, but not of the countryside. His interruption had thrown Miles into a passion of disappointment; yet even a more fortunate arrival might not have helped the

man. His hand was too moist and loose, his pale face too shrewdly wrinkled, and his smile, like the cold stare of his bulbous blue eyes, too calculating; even his trite compliments seemed a piece of insinuation. Altogether, Miles disliked him on sight, as one dislikes a grub or an earwig.

They returned together to the deck, where Old-Hab left them to confer. For some time the stranger made little use of his chance, but though all too ready and familiar, chattered and questioned trivially, with a studied inconsequence.

"Come," Miles broke in at last impatiently. "I don't see yet. Please tell me what I can do for you."

The man became very confidential.

"I'll be frank with you," he promised glibly. "We'll come square to it. Ain't that

right? I may have dealin's with a man over here, likely — man named Florio. Now, you're so high spoke of all round, I store by your opinion. See? So I come to you, like this, and says, — between us, mind, — what d' ye think about him?"

Miles considered. From the first mention, he vaguely saw trouble ahead for Tony; then, not at all vaguely, saw how that trouble might at least send Tony packing. The sooner the happier; toward just such a riddance his wishes ran like fire. To speak the mere truth, to aid the law: and in the same thought he stood confounded at his own baseness. The loyalty might all be on one side, yet —

"Better see Florio yourself," he answered. "You can judge. He lives up in the next cove."

The stranger argued long, and surrendered reluctantly.

"Well," he sighed, "I s'pose that's right, if you're so stubborn to it. I'll go see him."

He slouched away, and plunged among the bushes. Miles, climbing toward the house, paused halfway on the slope, to look down thoughtfully at the shore. Seldom had he encountered so many persons there in one day; never so many problems. Life, like the fiddle-heads, seemed to unfold into complexities. The river sparkled through chinks in the grove, and dazzled broadly across a distant gap, where the path swung bare to the headland. It was the one pass to Alward's. But the stranger did not darken it, either going or coming.

"He'll wait down there," thought Miles,

"then come lying back, and say he can't find Tony. Spying! And I could n't tell him!"

He could not, the fact was adamant — not even to save the hostage in the other camp.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE RUNNING BROOK

Some weeks later, at dusk on a calm evening, Miles and his sole companion sat outdoors for the first time that year. A little bench — Tony's handiwork — girdled the hackmatack, so that while leaning against the same trunk, each saw a different quarter of the valley, and talked over the shoulder lazily, facing two cardinal points, with thoughts as far asunder. The time was neither spring nor summer, but that rare Arcadian interval, too brief for a season, too elusive for even a transition, and yet in the calendar of sense marked off as plain as a festival. The night fell neither warm nor cool; a tempered fra-

grance of blossoms drew down, without stir of air, from the orchard over the hill; lower field and shore, river and farthest ridge, lay confounded in blackness under the stars, land and water parted only by faint zigzag margins, where the last edge of daylight lined some inlet or hooked about a promontory.

"Them days," continued Ella in a distant monotone, "the Injuns camped in back of ar house at Sweet Water. Old Lewie Neptune, he was chieft. An' nights he got drunk, he'd pitch 'em outdoor, so's all hands would come beg for in. Midnight an' bitter cold, sometimes, women-fo'ks an' youngsters, they rout us out o' bed. Big Mary, Æneas Moon an' his brother Peter, an' Lolas an' Francises an' Socabasins, — whol' slews of 'em, all wropped an' huddledt up in blankets, scairt, an' sayin' they'd be killed. I see

the kitchen floor covered with 'em, many the time, sleepin' curled round the stove— Who's that?"

A flurry of footsteps came up out of the dark; some one raced by them toward the house.

"We're out here," called Miles, rising. "What's wanted?"

"Oh!" The runner stopped, and returned panting. "I've come. You told me to."

"Anna!" he cried joyfully.

She stood for an instant motionless, breathing hard; gave a little failure of a laugh; then spoke quickly, in a voice meant to be calm.

"I stood them as long as I could. Now you must tell me where to go. Those men! While my father stayed himself, I had somebody; but now he's — they're both against

me." She broke off, as though stifled. "I'll never go back; I won't, I won't!"

Ella suddenly moved between them.

"Come in the house," she ordered coldly. "Can't see ye. If the' 's trouble, we'll take a light to it, first thing."

They went in together to the front room. Miles lighted the candle (which, since Tony's day, replaced the lamp) and over the trembling leaf-point of flame saw the girl's head start into radiance like a vision. She stood before them with a half-shy, half-defiant composure; but her eyes and her brown cheeks told another story, a pulse throbbed in her bare throat, and under the thin blue cloth her breathing fluttered deeply.

"He tried to beat me," she said, with the same quiet scorn. "Me, after all the time I was—"

Ella had stood watching with eyes puckered skeptically, and round face set in lines of no compromise. But now, without warning, she flung both her stout arms round the refugee.

"Wild Injuns!" she fumed. "What was I tellin' ye? You're all alike, you men-fo'ks. There, there, poor thing!" Awkward and motherly, she stroked the girl's bright hair, scolding and consoling in a breath. "There, there, nubbin, you're all of a quiver — all on a string. Worse 'n old Neptune, they are! — Miles, I left my knittin' somewheres by that tree. Jest you hyper out an' find it."

Needles and all, it lay on the table before them, but Miles obeyed. He paced back and forth under the stars, watching the lighted window. He should be sorry for her, ran his thought. But his one clear emotion was nothing of the kind; buoyantly, against rea-

son and through suspense, rioted the conviction that all was well. When the voices ceased within, he entered, and found the two women sitting like friends agreed. They smiled at him rather uncertainly.

"Well," exclaimed the elder, whipping a handkerchief out of sight. "That's settled, anyhow. She'll stay here with us till she finds somewheres better."

"But I forgot," the girl objected. "All my things are there."

"I'll get them," offered Miles.

"You'd look well," the servant retorted grimly. "I'll go my own self. Incidental, I'll see that pair o' shoats. And they won't ask me to set and come again, either!"

"But," said the girl, "they'll come after me."

"Let 'em!" cried Ella, with sudden ex-

travagance. "I'll set 'em down so hard they — they can comb their hair with their spinal columes! Let 'em come."

For that night no one accepted the challenge; and next morning Ella promptly descended on Alward's, to return in ferocious triumph, bearing a little armful of spoils.

"There's your clothes!" she cried with the voice of Deborah. "A haley old mess that house is already, without ye! What did I say to 'em? Never you mind. They know more 'n they did. The fear o' the Lord's the beginnin' o' wisdom. I said what was vouched to me that hour. I bit a piece out o' the roof!"

At all events she had determined the situation, and from now forward there were three in the house. It seemed incredible. Miles passed the first days in a dream, a

revolution of thoughts and habits. To have this shining guest come and go upon the stairs, or sit at table like a mortal, or read beside the window on rainy afternoons, or move at night overhead in Tony's chamber, not only threw all indoor routine into the bright confusion of drama, but changed the very air upon the hills, the light on the waters. The valley was visited, like the plains of Mamre.

And even when this earliest wonder passed, and they began to live as though always under the same roof, he could not find the old bearings. The change had scattered, tossed, and revived his faculties, as haymakers pitch a mouldy windrow abroad in the sun. By an odd transfer, she who rightfully should radiate all that was new and strange, had slipped at once into customary life, established,

familiar, like a thing of childhood; and when they walked the shore, dug in the garden side by side, or tended lamps in the early evening, it was she who always had belonged there: all other things — trees he had seen grow, rocks he knew in every line and fissure, paths he could follow running in the dark — had altered as after long absence or some new gift of sight.

It was a happy, incomprehensible time; none the less happy, although he felt somehow that vague elements were weaving into danger, that an unknown thread guided them in a maze. Perhaps it was only that their delight would keep no even level, but daily mounted; perhaps that in their simplest talk, when their friendship seemed the oldest, there fell a silence, a chance word, a shock of difference or agreement, a flash of bygone

things, to show how unerringly their lines converged, across what gulfs.

One afternoon, when summer had glowed and ripened, they revisited Kilmarnock Brook. Alders flanked the bend through a long meadow, mapping it distantly as a curved wall of darker green, and losing it, to near approach, in a cool, low wood where grassy clearings wound so intricately that a stranger (unless he made the one plunge through tangle) might wander among leaves, see the oozy light quivering over them from below, and hear the invisible water sing like a stream of Tantalus. But Anna and Miles knew all these interlocked recesses, and, threading them in and out, had reached their own secret place, — an alder closet, where a tiny crescent of lawn curved round a pool. On a bank which ran smoothly into brown water, they sat

a little apart, in shadow. Above them sunlight dappled the leaves, and day-flies danced in brief ecstasy; below, with a delicate breath of steeping earth and roots and brookmint, the water stole away silently, to take up its tinkling narrative round the next bend.

For a long time neither had spoken. Suddenly Miles laughed.

"Ophelia!"

She was looking past her open book, considering the pool.

"You need n't call names," she replied, without rousing. "Besides, I don't know what you mean."

"'Read on this book!'" he scoffed. "The old chucklehead knew! No girl would ever read *in* one."

"A lot you know about them!" She laughed at him, with a sidelong glance, but

quickly returned to her contemplation. "I was thinking."

"What?"

She shook her head. A leaf-pattern of shadows and golden flame settled once more upon it, trembling.

"The river-drivers," she answered at last. "I was only thinking about the river-drivers."

Following her glance, he tried, as he had so often tried in the last weeks, to see with her eyes. The peace of the pool beside them, like all peace in Nature, was an illusion. Minnows steered over the brown sand, or whipped their magnified shadows, blurred and globular, through sunny patches under the farther bank; even where the water lay most dark and thick, weeds tugged slowly at the tether; and over the surface her "river-drivers," snapping and kicking between wind

and water, floated erratically down an imperceptible current.

"About those?" he asked incredulously. "What, those beetles?"

"Yes." Her eyes danced with that look of hers which he had never seen in any other person, — a look both grave and whimsical. "Yes, they're only beetles. See, though: they scoot here and there, but always head upstream. They can't have any reason to, and it's so much easier going down. And still they're stubborn, and fight along. I wonder — I think they must have an Idea."

"You're a funny girl!" he laughed. Yet as he watched, the darting insects began to appear not wholly insensate.

"Now the fish down there," she continued, as though to herself, "they nose about their business. And the day-flies — with them it's

pastures almost without word or look, like pilgrims crossing the Debatable Ground. And when they had climbed the last hill, and come racing steeply down toward the river and the house, she went straight to the shelter of Ella's kitchen.

He did not see her alone again till that evening. Meanwhile he had walked the shore, raging at himself for what had passed, put almost beside his reason at thought of what might come. After blindness, it was an aching sight that disclosed how their friendship — so wholesome, firm, and precious — could change at a breath, and in the most tranquil moment of security could totter above unknown deeps. Was he then worse than Tony, and their house no better than the drunkard's? This girl had fled to him; she had taken his promises, was here upon his honor;

and now, because he had willfully drifted down a pleasant way, they had reached such a pass that — He closed the thought with a groan. By some detestable trick, he foresaw, their very speech could no longer be free and honest.

She made no offer, that evening, to go down with him to the lamps; and he was rather glad of the fact than sorry at its cause. To walk alone from tower to tower, through the cool firs and cedars, proved a respite. Yet when he faced the hill to return, trepidation seized him afresh. He climbed toward the house, vexed and wondering; and for the second time in all his memory, was afraid to enter.

She sat behind the candle-flame, a great book flattened wide on the table, and her head bent over it as for dear life. All the

brightness in the room had gathered in this corner, and at first he dared not go near. But it was now or never with his play-acting; and so, choosing a book at random, he sat down opposite her resolutely, to begin the pretense that all things remained as before.

Ella had gone to bed with the birds. Except the two readers, all the world might have been asleep. Their breathing, and the tick of a deathwatch in the wall, made the only sounds in house or valley. For all the window stood open, the little blade of light between them reared without wavering. This silence at full stretch, this preposterous calmness at close range, were alike unreal and unbearable. His book appeared to be "The Polar and Tropical Worlds," a treasury of boyhood; but the pictures swam in a blur — icebergs, gorillas, the open coffin on Spitz-

bergen, the march of land-crabs through a palm-grove, all an empty jumble. Sometimes his eyesight escaped the page; but then perhaps he found her looking up, by the same chance; caught for an instant, as her eyes dropped, the last of a pitiful, appealing light; and plunged into his book again, like a desperate man hunting a text of divination.

He might thus have turned a hundred pages, and she none at all, when the contest ended. There came a stir, a little broken sound, abrupt and choking, which tugged at his heart more than words.

"Oh," she sobbed, "where can I go next?" and dropped head upon arms, across the open volume.

As though a musket were shot off in the room, his chair had struck the floor. He

circled the table and caught her up, in a gust that sent the candle-light reeling.

"Oh, what a wretched girl!" she cried, her voice stifled in his jacket.

All the inevitable drift of their summer, the whole multitude of their hidden motives, shone clear before and about them, — a wide, manifold peace in the tumult, like a field of daisies seen by lightning.

## CHAPTER X

### TONY PASSES

THE birds, after a dawning chorus of vehement, almost theatric joy, made their first short flights from cover to cover among the elms. The rim of eastern hills had grown incandescent, till like a coal of fire snapping a tight cord, the sun burned through the horizon, and drove thin vapors slowly across the river. They rolled back, parting for a phantom Exodus. The breath of the sea mingled sharply with cool fresh-water smells alongshore, and in the fields with the fairy spice of dying strawberry leaves. It was that bright weather which comes once in a man's life; and Miles, his boots soaked in dew,

spattered to the knee with white and yellow petals, came wading home through tall grass.

Ella was rattling about her stove, alone in the kitchen.

"Don't track that gurry in here," she commanded, glancing sourly.

"What's the odds," he laughed, "a morning like this? It's all clean."

She turned on him sharply, but in the same instant checking her reply, gave him a suspicious, discountenancing stare.

"Leapin' the fields, hey?" She slammed the iron door with something like a grunt.

Miles sat down on the doorstep, as if to clean his boots, but in reality to give his thoughts a breathing-space, survey the new kingdoms which they had coursed, and take the height and depth of their discovery. Not over the hills, or past the dazzling limit of

the bay, but here in these four walls lived his happiness. The old plans, long disregarded and summer-fallow, now lay entirely barren. He had meant to go away, to run about in the world, and for no purpose, except to seek in new combinations what he might all the time have left buried here. Here in this house the past grief, the present transport, alike had found their man. And what greed could harry more out of life? Nowhere else, here; in wonder he turned to look indoors upon that homely and amazing theatre.

Instead, he saw Ella standing over him in the doorway. The strangeness of her look at once laid hold of him; for the round, freckled face was no longer whimsical, but sad, earnest, even a little pale.

She was the first to speak.

"Don't you be mad," she began. "Don't

be mad with me, will ye, for what I'm goin' to say?"

"Why, Ella," he laughed, "of course not. What's the matter?"

"Lots." She nodded, grave and threatening. "Lots the matter. I be'n a foolish, cross-eyed old woman: that's the first. Set up for a smart contriver, and 'ain't the brains o' Larrabee's calf. Oh, meddlin' with people! It's dangerous, I tell ye, Miles, it's dangerous! Ye mean well, all along, and stir things round so clever (ye think), and then some mornin' wake up to see you've upsot all — hurrah's nest, everything on top, an' nothin' to hand!"

She made a clumsy, derisive gesture, and spoke on, hurriedly, a tinge of red rising in her cheeks.

"Funny I'd use that sailor-talk I learnt

from him. But there! Might's well say it: he was in my mind." She looked away from Miles, and down upon the river, where the topsails of a schooner, slate gray, glided above the fir-points. "When ain't he there? Though I guess you never heard me talk o' him before. Ben Constantine, that was — Seems no more'n last week I see his tops'ls go down same as hers now. And I never — I ain't ever spoke of it sence. That's how I know. And that's how I say it's dangerous."

Her eyes returned to him wearily, and yet with such depth and fire as he had not known they could contain.

"What did I promise?" she cried, in reproach. "What else did I promise your gran'father, that last day, but jest to take his place and see you steered the course? And look at me, how I let all slide, so long —

because you and me and Anna has lived happy here! 'Tain't a world to be happy in, but to git ahead. And the Lord forgive me for sayin' that, if it should be a lie!"

He could only stare at her, astounded by this flame from ashes, this grief, perplexity, and passionate conviction.

"So you must go. When I see that light to your eyes this mornin', and on your face — Oh, I know it still, these many years — Come, go, before she 'pears to be somethin' dropped down out the skies right beside ye! But anyhow, 'fore that poor child thinks the same o' you. If ye don't, what's ahead for her? Oh, it takes me to know what!"

Miles held up a restraining hand.

"Too late, Ella," he declared soberly. "She seems that already, and — I told her."

The woman dropped her arms as in defeat.

"Be good to us all!" she groaned. "It's my fault."

"I could n't help it," he began weakly.

"Help it!" she snapped, with an instant change of temper. "I should hope not! Help human natur'? Who are you, to talk that way? Gunpowder's gunpowder: it goes bang in the best settin'-room or out in the street. But this time 't was my fault."

"No," said a voice behind them, "it was mine."

They turned like conspirators taken in the fact, and with a mixed dismay; for the girl stood by the kitchen table, not only tranquil as a judge, but white as a victim. Her bearing was unchanged, her voice level; she had never seemed more beautiful, more necessary; and yet the very friendship in her eyes struck him like a blow.

"The other door was open," she said, with the same mortal calmness. "At first I did n't know you meant me. It's my fault, Ella. But it's easy to set right. I'll go this morning."

They both cried out against her.

"Go! Hark the nonsense!" Ella tried cheerfully to bluster. "We was jest talkin'! Go where?"

"It does n't matter where," she answered steadily. "The main thing is to go. I did wrong to stay at all, but — I did n't understand."

With a face as pale as her own, Miles stood grasping the door frame. He had been raised above the world, to see the lighted prospect of felicity; and now his pinnacle was knocked from under.

"Anna," he ventured, moving heavily across the threshold. "Anna, don't —"

"I did n't understand." Her lips trembled slightly, but she met him still with that intolerable friendliness. "The less we say now, the — the better every way."

All three stood at a loss, without speaking. There seemed no outlet to their distress. The fire fluttering in the stove mocked them with small, pleasant, household sounds.

Other sounds went unheeded. They heard a runner come pounding down the hill, saw him flash past the window, and might never have turned to look, had he not bounded in headlong at the door. Tony, his black hair tousled as by a gale, his face fire-red and shining with sweat, caught breath enough to laugh. The brown butt of a pistol stuck out from the flap of his shirt.

"Miles, old mate, I need you!" he panted. They had not met since the quarrel, yet here

he stood, catching up their old relation as handily as though he had but stepped outdoors a moment ago. "Run up to Alward's and fetch the boat, will you? I'm in a mess." Catching sight of the two women, he nodded cheerfully. "Hallo! No time for shore manners. I'm in a mess. Come outside a jiffy."

Miles followed him into the sunlight. Below the step Tony turned his back upon the door, and spoke in a rapid undertone.

"I must get across that river. Savee?" His breath still came hard, his face shone bright, like that of a man inspired by danger; and he watched the hill above, with little side glances, cool and shrewd. "Abe's done it this time — killed a man. On the spree. Poor ass named Furfey. Finish!"

In the same breath his indifference vanished. He looked Miles square in the eye, full force.

"We've had our ins and outs," he urged, "but you can't think I'm up to that, now! Can you?"

It was impossible to deny the man's earnestness.

"All right, then," he cried heartily. "If you believe me, I don't care! But *they* won't! That teamster found it, and Abe's got away clear. Half Kilmarnock's hanging about Alward's; other half out chasing me, pitchfork and blunderbuss. Get the boat, will you? I doubled and slipped 'em, up there in the woods —"

In the act of nodding toward the hill, he paused and listened.

"Oh, did I, though?" he drawled satiric-

ally; then laughing like a schoolboy, he shook his fist at the landscape, whirled about, and darted into the house.

A squad of men bobbed into sight above the crest, and came running heavily down. The first was Old-Hab; the last — fat, cautious, and far behind — was Quinn the postmaster. They swarmed about Miles at the door, all seven or eight, like men who had their fill of running; but their eyes were sharpened, their tongues loosed, with the excitement of a lifetime; and their firearms, though of a quaint variety, were solid and efficacious.

Of the many questions, Old-Hab's rose loudest.

"Where's the murd'rer?" he shouted, grounding a "Zulu" fowling-piece. "Which way'd he run, Mile?"

"What murderer?" said Miles, giving Tony all benefits.

"Why," began Habakkuk, "the black man with the teeth — this Ital—"

But his followers sent up a roar.

"There he goes! There he goes!"

The whole posse swept on down the hill. Below, halfway to the evergreens, Tony was racing in full view. He cleared the rough hillside in flying bounds, nimble as a goat. By slipping through the house he had gained such a screen for his start, that now, with fifty yards to spare, he dove headfirst into the cedars, and disappeared.

Habakkuk's men plunged after — Miles among the foremost — and, lashing each other with springy branches as they fought through, swung up river along the shore. The sailor thundered across the gully bridge, clattered

over the quarter-deck, and passed at once out of earshot. Running their hardest, they caught neither sight nor sound. Then suddenly, from the shore below, a man hallooed. The roar of a gun shattered the early morning stillness, echoed along rocks and river. Miles and the others breasted the lower bushes on the headland, in time to see, against the white side of the stunted obelisk ahead, a flying figure spring up, wrench open the door, slip through, and slam it shut.

Round the next bend they nearly fell over a man stooping in the path. He rose — a young giant with a shock of sun-bleached hair, who grinned foolishly at Habakkuk.

"Nigh winged 'im, pa," he chuckled. "Thought I hed, but don't see no blood.'

"Ye brimston' w'elp!" cried his father bitterly. "Who wants to see any?"

"W'elp, hey?" retorted Lazy-Hab, serene as an ox. "Who else was a-watchin' the shore? He woulden' 'a' run inland. Stood to reason." He blew the smoke from his gun-barrel, and added proudly: "All is, 't was me doubled 'im. We got 'im now, tighter 'n pitch."

As they drew near, no sound came from the little tower. The sailor had gained, at least, the high advantage of being neither heard nor seen. Halting, the men waited in uneasy silence, — so uneasy, that they began to scatter behind firs and boulders. Old-Hab stood in the open, negligently, but with a face more weazened than ever.

"Inside there!" he called, in a doubtful tone. "The' 's been fogo enough, fer one mornin'. Master fogo. Better come out and make it no worse. We don't hanker fer no more shootin'."

"More you'll get, if you try to rush me." Tony's voice rang hollow within the walls. "I'm better at it, too, than that young red-headed savage, there." He paused. "I tell you. There's just one way out o' this nonsense. Send Miles Bissant in here. I can trust him. We'll splice things up. Fair play, now, and flag o' truce, mind you! Him alone, or I'll — "

"That's fair," said Miles, and stepped forward.

Old-Hab clutched his arm.

"It's a trick!" he whispered. "Don't ye go, Mile. It's a trick! He might — ye may git hurt —"

"Somebody may, anyhow," Miles answered, pulling free. "Keep your men back." He walked to the foot of the lighthouse, and called, "Here you are, Tony."

The door swung barely enough to let him squeeze through, and slammed at once. In the gloom, he heard the lock click, and Tony laugh quietly.

"Lucky I forgot to give up my key! Got yours with you?"

Miles fumbled in his pockets. "No," he answered.

"Good boy! Great!" The sailor swore joyfully under his breath. "They have n't caught me yet! Come topside where I can see you."

They climbed the stairs, and, blinking at the sudden daylight glare in the lamp-room, sat face to face on opposite edges of the trap-door. Tony laid his pistol at his thigh, leaned back against a coil of rope, and swung his feet comfortably in the lower darkness.

"It's bad pidgin," he said, frowning. "Bad.

Only some revenue skunk, but then! What business has a dead man to look so beastly respectable, all at once? Damn it!" Heaving his shoulders, he laughed scornfully. "Abe was getting ready to sell me out. The price, I fancy, was where they disagreed."

He spat down the stairway, in disgust.

"Funny," he continued after a pause; "you're the only person *would* believe me. It's just Abe's word against mine, and he's got clear. If they catch me — Humph! Finish!" He patted the coil of rope, and dropped head on shoulder, in a shocking pantomime. "But you're the one I expected to founder on, not Abe. Ever since you sighted old Quong that night — you remember? The Chinaman: he bought for me. And yet here you sit, the one man to believe

me!" — He leaned across, clapped Miles on the shoulder, and shook him gently. His face lighted, very grave and simple. "Lied to you so much, I don't — Anyhow, God bless you, old Sober-sides!"

He leaned back again, laughed as though ashamed, and swung his feet vigorously.

"Opium was our game," he said. "Tidy consignment stowed across the river. If I could once get over, and see Graves, the rest is all greased ways. I'd have made it, too, but that young red-head" (he raised a tattered shirt-sleeve) "nearly blew my arm off. We've seen enough of that. But we'll see worse, unless you do what I ask you. They're fools, but no cowards; that's what I figure on — Just one way; do it, and all's right and tight, every man Jack, safe and sound. Will you?"

"What is it?" said Miles. "I came up here to make terms."

"So you did," laughed Florio. "And here's mine. You slip down, quiet as you can; unlock the door, quiet as you can; leave the key in the lock, and wait on the stairs till I signal you to come topside again. I promise not to lay a finger on one of 'em. Solemn!" Seeing Miles hesitate, he scrambled to his feet briskly. "Take or leave it, that's my ultimatum. They've got me in a clove hitch. Lies with you, now, to fetch us all out alive."

Slowly, far from satisfied, Miles swung down through the floor. He had already sunk into the darkness, when Tony called, —

"Steady a bit."

He saw the man's head and shoulder,

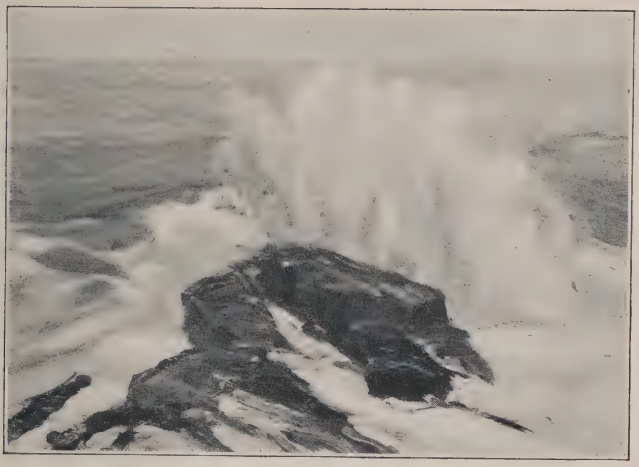
sharp in the lighted square above; saw a great arm thrust down; and felt his own hand gripped with a surprising warmth.

"About that girl," growled Tony. "I hope you know that she's a wonder. You made me damned mad, because — Well, I'm getting old, maybe. I really did — She did fetch me. You that's young! Tell her that, some day."

He let go, and drew back out of sight. Miles, in astonishment, groped his way down to the door. A few light, scurrying sounds came from above; the turning key squeaked faintly; then all the hollow shaft was filled with silence.

He saw neither purpose nor sense in their agreement, which, the longer he waited, the less he liked. Tony's afterthought, moreover, stuck oddly in his memory, like words

at parting. He had begun to wonder what signal the sailor would give, when, sudden and deafening in that confinement, a pistol-shot rang overhead.



## CHAPTER XI

### THE RISK

He took the stairs at a bound, stumbling in the dark. Below, while he mounted, an uproar broke out. "Come ahead! No! I told ye! Wait, hol' on! What, leave him? Stave 'er in!" Through it sounded another voice, clear as the ring of good metal in a brawl. "Afraid!" It was Anna, crying indignantly, "And you sent him! Grown men, afraid? Then I will without you!"

Next moment — catching his breath like a diver, at thought of what he was about to see — he surged up through the bright square. He met an equal shock of relief and bewilderment. A pair of boots lay on the

floor; white layers of smoke drew thinly past the gleaming brass-work of the lamp; but except for these and the smell of gunpowder, the room was empty. The sailor — it seemed at first glance — had vanished like a goblin. But though the stair shook with hurried trampling, Miles heard above it a sharp, jerky, sawing noise, cut short just as a bight of rope, rasping double round a beam, uncoiled and flew single out at the open window. Tony was gone, then, in no flash of fire; but why had he shot off his pistol?

Before Miles could find the answer, a scuffle rose at the stair-head.

"Leave go! Let me go!" cried Anna furiously.

"No, ye don't! Me first!" And Old-Hab swarmed up through the opening. Whatever he expected to encounter, his face

was white with anything but fear. "You!" he exclaimed, lowering his gun. "You! Where's — Thank God, 't any rate!"

Behind him the girl's head rose, gleaming first in the sun, then — as she found Miles — with an inward and more vital splendor. They did not speak, or need to; for in one bright instant of surprise each saw the other restored and exalted.

Behind her, in turn, came huddling upward the faces of the men, some red, some pale, but all wide-eyed, gaping, and contorted, like faces of hunters at the mouth of a lair.

"What in — Where's he gone?" they shouted.

"Got away," called Miles. "Down a rope, and pulled it after!"

The crowding heads ducked in a single

impulse, the fury of the chase. "Down ag'in, boys! Out from under, there! Git along!" roared the voices; and below them, a seafaring bass, bawling in the deaf ears of Lazy-Hab, "Slid down a rope! Ketch him yit!"

Slow and inquisitive, the teamster moved toward the window, leaned in the open section, and then suddenly turned, with a grin.

"Look a-here, Mile," he said, pointing a stubby finger.

Far below, the sailor was racing straight down the beach. His red stockings twinkled as he leaped the rocks, scurried over the wet sand, and, running out knee-deep, fell forward with a great splash. His arm flailed the water in desperate over-hand strokes; his head became the black point in a widening arrow-head of ripples.

"Let 'im go," said Old-Hab stolidly. "We done our part. Good riddance, bad rubbage."

But Miles had turned.

"They'll fire at him," he said, and clattered down the stairs. Shouts and curses rose to meet him, and outrageous blows set the tower resounding like a drum. Penned at the foot of the stairway, the men were battering the door with boot and gun-butt. And then for the first time, Miles, half laughing, half indignant, saw how the sailor had used him for the trick. These honest madcaps had rushed in to his rescue; and fairly on the heels of the hindmost, Tony had reached in, stolen out the key, and locked the door.

For a long time it held solidly, while they clamored and pounded. Forming a little phalanx, all hands, they flung at it together;

again and again it held, and they fell back, rubbing sore shoulders; till at last hinge or casing crashed, splinters flew, and the captives tumbled through into the sunshine, with an impetus that sent Lazy-Hab rolling on the grass.

"We'll see!" he cried ferociously, and, bouncing up, ran round the base of the tower.

The others streamed after. On a bare ledge of pink granite, all stood at fault, scanning the empty shore. Then Lazy-Hab, with a short, harsh sound of merriment, pointed calmly. Out in a steel-bright strip of water, a black disc, smaller than the tip of a buoy, bobbed with living regularity.

"Long shot," he chuckled, "but I've hit the kag on the beacon, furder."

He had swung up his gun, when Miles,

breaking through the group, wrenched it from his hands.

"Wha' d' ye mean?" bellowed the marksman, raging. "You let a foreign murd'rer —"

"That's enough!" ordered Miles coldly. "You came near being a home-made one." He turned on the men, sharp and bitter. "You fellows come to!" he said, and speaking on, with a few domineering words found himself their master.

"That's right," growled one. "Talkin' sense, Mr. Bissant," another nodded; "told 'em that, myself." Old Quinn, with a sheepish, absent grin of innocence, smuggled the cartridge from his gun. Their little tumult was over, save in fireside history. And Miles had known his first moment of command.

As he turned, however, his thoughts were

of something quite different and distant. He saw that black dot move down aslant the shining channel, lose all apparent energy in the distance, and, dead as a bit of driftwood, float past the foot of the island. But in imagination, clearer than a spyglass, he pictured Tony swimming on, the sharp catch of his breath, the labor of his great muscles against the tide, and wondered, as the dark mote lessened on the water, what thoughts it might confine. Only plans, perhaps, for his own unruly future; the sailor, consistent to the last, had played upon them all; now he would but change the scene and the persons. And still—"If things had been different," thought Miles, "if we'd started in together, somehow—" The head drifted out of the paler surfaces, blurred into the dark, jagged margin of the further shore, entered the inverted

evergreen forest, and, crossing the white streak where a birch trunk gleamed on the mirror, was lost in safety. And with it, Miles felt some piece of his old self departing.

When he turned away, at last, he found the men dispersing along the shore toward Alward's, and saw, through a gap in the firs, Anna and the teamster climbing the distant field slowly, with now and then a pause or gesture, like people in earnest talk. He was hardly at the foot of the hill, when they had reached the house and gone indoors. He followed, wondering why they had not waited. From between the hackmatacks he could hear three voices contending, then two, and as his foot grated on the doorstep, none. In the kitchen Ella and the teamster met him with a guilty silence, while overhead a light step

came and went, and as if with a lighter spirit, the girl hummed little intervals of song. When these sounds returned downstairs, Ella faced about with an air that was almost gay.

"Now," she cried, "for breakfast!"

All four sat down by the sunny window. From the outset, Miles found the meal bewildering. Plainly his companions had shared some secret. They glanced and laughed inconsequently; they talked of Tony and the escape, with a curious exhilaration, and more curious gaps of silence; they gave to this meagre breakfast a sense of banqueting, but banqueting under the edge of some unusual event, soon to fall. The girl's eyes, her every word and movement, were as lamps and music to a feast. And Habakkuk, dipping and swerving his weather-vane countenance,

was flushed with her praises like a minstrel.

"All the rest scairt, and she run slap into the lighthouse!" he was repeating, when she cut him short.

"Come on," she laughed, and, rising, ended their brief revel. They trooped after her to the kitchen, where she caught up a bundle from the floor. Hab wrested it from her arms, with the bow and flourish of a country dancer, and still laughing as in a game, she turned to Ella, and held out both hands.

"Good-by," she said.

"I won't say it!" rebelled the other violently, but next instant had clasped her in a bear-like hug. "Oh, my old precious, good-by! Yes, you're right, you're right!"

The pair, still embracing, moved clumsily out through the doorway. Then Ella re-

leased her, crying between laughter and distress, —

"But you'll be back!" She wrung the girl's hand. "You'll come back like old Douglas, time they give him the gold cane and the speech — "

But the joke failed her, and the good creature fled into the house. Habakkuk, with his burden, was already climbing the slope. Anna beckoned to Miles, who followed her in bleak amazement, as if all his friends had turned to strangers, and all their doings to some alien by-play. Side by side, the two began the sharp ascent.

"What's all this, Anna?" he said reproachfully. "What does it mean?"

She only laughed, stretched out a hand for help, and, falling back at arm's length, made him pull her by main strength, tug-

ging and slipping, up the tawny hillside. Not until he had paused for breath, high in the wind above house and field, would she answer.

"It means I understand." She looked away toward the sea, a strange, distant light upon her face. "It means I'm happy. It means — well, Tony showed the way."

Miles eyed her gloomily.

"It means you're going," he said with bitterness. "That's all I see. Oh, Anna! Do you think I could change over night?"

She faced him with steady eyes but a wavering smile.

"You seem to think I can!" she retorted. Then with that sudden elfin gravity, "When you were in the tower," she said, "and we all thought — Miles, I began to see, then. You must risk a person. It's like the wars.

You must risk him, to find out all you — all he —"

She paused with a little, helpless motion, studied the ground between them, then raised the light of her eyes.

"We three settled it before you came. An old woman that Habakkuk knows — he'll take me there in his wagon. No!" she laughed, "I won't tell you where! But she's been sick, and all alone. Afterwards I may come back to Ella — when you're gone." She tossed her radiant young head in the breeze, and the sunshine caught it like a flying standard. "So it's all right, and nobody's there to stop you any more, and you'll become the great man, and the lamps won't go out, and —"

"Suppose," he broke in, "suppose I did n't become ?"

"There it is again!" she cried in triumph. "The war! You 'll study and work, the way men do. Yours will be all the brave part, the fighting and broken heads; mine's only — the risking. Perhaps they come back with the trumpets and flags and everything, or blind, on a crutch, or never at all. Do you think I did n't know that? Why, we're only — we're all poor river-drivers in the brook together. Go on, go out! Till you're out and away, I'll never come back here in the world!"

"Anna!" he cried, and could only repeat that name, as though it were the whole revelation. She, and she alone, had opened a great window in his world. Never before had he felt life to be so dangerous and inspiring, or himself, in the vast welter, so puny and so invincible. For him, she had cut the bonds

of Prometheus; for herself — she stood there unchanged, the same distant sea-light on her face, the same wavering smile. A sacrifice to youth had mounted here, in common words, on a common hill of bare granite, yellow grass, and mullein, and to his disgrace, all the offering seemed hers, and all the wonder.

"But I can't," he said. "You must promise when —"

"No," she answered quickly. "Let's not have promises. This much is ours; the rest we can't tell."

He gave an inarticulate cry.

"I won't have it!" he floundered angrily. "We can't go, this way. I won't let you!"

"Miles!" She checked him, very sternly. "What about the other time? Ella told me. You promised something once before, not just to him, but — all the others. You almost

— Had you better make any more promises yet?"

He felt his cheeks burn, and was unfit to lift his eyes toward her.

"Don't you see," she went on with an altered voice, "why we stopped right in this place?"

He saw only the parched grass quivering between them, and about their feet a silly multitude of grasshoppers snapping upward with thin, dry clicks, to sail in short curves deflected by the wind. In some former silence it had been so; but where he could not tell, nor could he raise his head out of this present shame. Far more visible before him lay his broken purpose, stripped of all disguise and easy palliation.

"Do you see why?" said Anna once more, and when he still made no answer, suddenly

clapped her hands like a child. "I've made him mad, I've made him mad!" she chanted. "Now he'll fight like a trooper!"

She laughed, a queer, short, hurried langh, and went on breathlessly.

"We say good-by here because it's the best place. And you don't remember it! And I do, and always did and always will, and I told you a dreadful fib in the boat, for the morning was just like this, and the grasshoppers just the same, and you had the thorn in your cheek, right exactly — there!"

Her volley of words was swift, her movement swifter. The breath was still warm on his cheek as he reached out with a cry. But once more she was bounding up the path, light as the wind in her hair. He heard her laughing as she ran, plunged a few steps after, but halted as he saw her, without a glance

behind, overtake the plodding figure of Habakkuk. It was ended, she was right.

The two moved slowly over the crest, sank to their shoulders in the shimmering grasses of the sky-line. For a time the black cap of the one, the bright head of the other, went bobbing and dwindling against the whiteness of a cloud. Then these also blurred into the rim, and sank. A wind — the first wind of early autumn — followed them over the hill, whitening the grass in little scallops and waves, in puffs and whirls, and sudden scurrying lines, like the breath of a colorless flame, passing incessantly upward.

He stood watching, alone with the wind and the cloud. When at last he gave over, and wheeled about, the whole valley was darkened and vacated. He did not see it, or the house, or the river, for in this opposite direction lay

only something unpalatable, necessary, with a short name that was no less trite than wonderful. Toward that he went downhill resolutely, eager to begin, anxious, exulting, like a man who has set his face toward the wars.

THE END

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